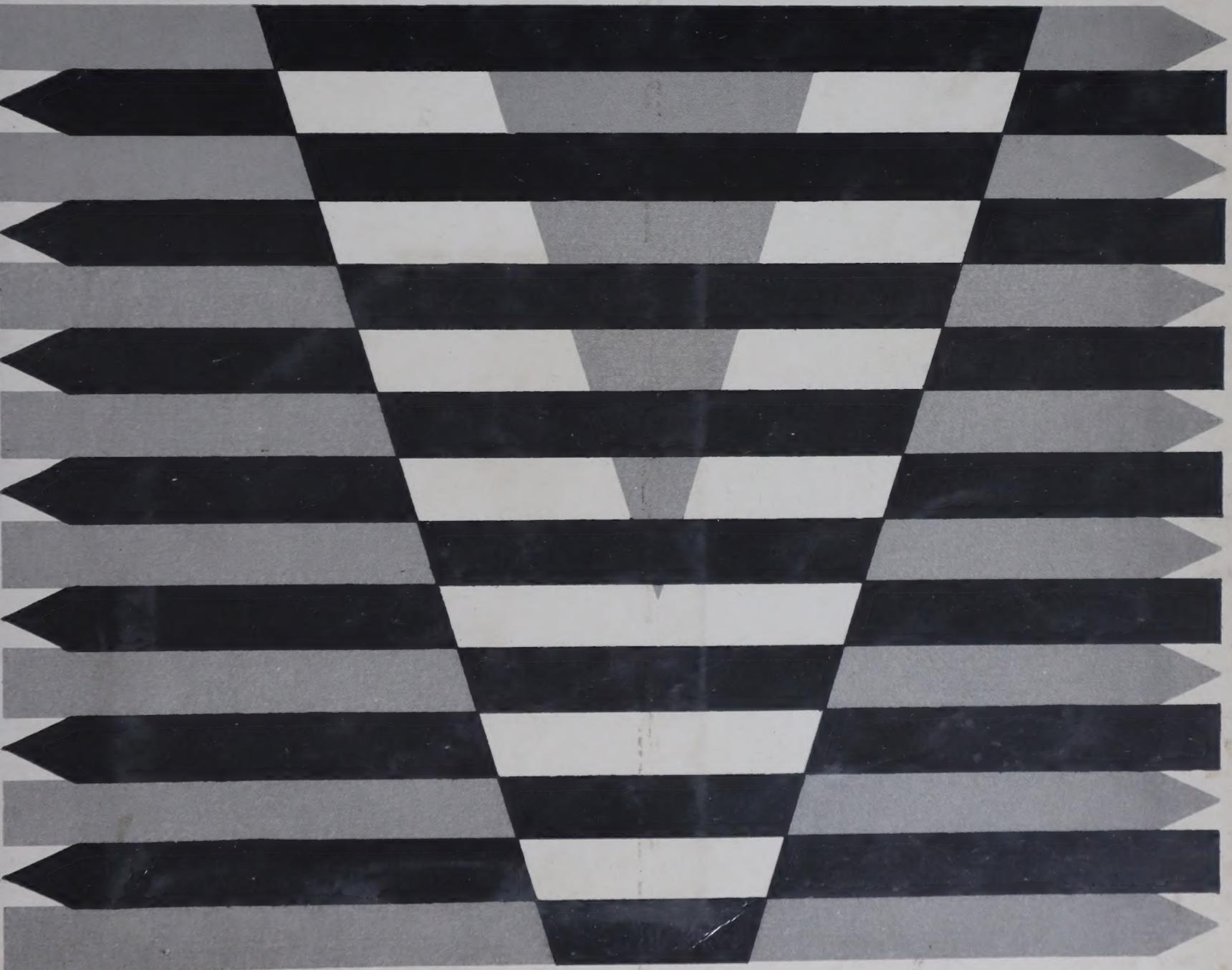


# **VOLUNTARY DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS IN INDIA**

**A STUDY OF HISTORY, ROLES AND FUTURE  
CHALLENGES**



2506



COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL

Block Koramangala

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CHALLENGES

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## PREFACE

This study on the history, roles and related aspects of voluntary development organisations in India evolved through our own intensive involvement in supporting the growth and development of voluntary initiatives in the country. As an educational support organisation to grass-roots initiatives, we began to learn about contemporary challenges and problems facing voluntary organisations in India.

As a result, in early 1987, we began to formulate broad ideas about this study. In our discussions with leaders of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in India, we elaborated a design for the study which would create an opportunity for wider interaction and dialogue. Over the 30 month period since July 1988, interactions with many voluntary organisations and leaders took place. This created the possibility for evolving a shared knowledge about NGOs in India.

We are grateful to International Development Research Centre, Canada for the financial support to the study and its documents. We also acknowledge efforts and time contributed by Balaji Pandey, ISED, Bhubaneshwar, Binoy Acharya, UNNATI, Ahmedabad and Anil Kumar Singh of VANI, New Delhi in this endeavour.

We are happy to have been involved in conducting this study. We hope to continue this process of study and reflection. We believe that the issues addressed in this study will require continuous reflection and dialogue. We hope that the popular documents, study report, annotated bibliography and case studies, produced during this process will continue to contribute to this ongoing process of reflection within the community of NGOs in India, and outside.

November 1991



## BACKGROUND

The last decade could well be called the decade of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Voluntary Development Organizations, Voluntary Agencies, etc. In the broader arena of the development debate, the work and experiences of NGOs have received particular visibility during the last decade. Whether it is Adult Education and Literacy or Primary Health Care, NGOs seem to have made their mark. Issues of women's rights, themes of women and development, of oppression against women and gender discrimination are today at the centre-stage of the development debate and on the agenda of planning for programmes because of the work of citizens' groups, women's organizations, voluntary agencies and the like. In more recent years, the entire spectrum of the debate on the question of environment and sustainable development can easily be traced back to the work, as well as the experiences of those associated with NGOs and voluntary organizations.

This visibility has been possible, on the one hand, because of the claims and public postures taken by the NGOs, consortiums and networks of NGOs themselves. The internationalisation of those networks and linkages across NGOs has, on the other hand, only helped to increase that visibility. Bringing hitherto neglected sectors and clusters of population into development planning — women, tribals, the landless, working children, etc. — is being claimed as one of the major contributions of voluntary development organizations during the last few decades. Raising issues hitherto ignored in development dialogue, debate and planning — issues of legal rights, women's oppression, deforestation, sustainable development, indigenous health practices etc. — has also been claimed to be possible because of the continuous work of NGOs in these areas.

The growing visibility of NGOs provoked a series of associated responses. Major international and national development agencies, planners, ideologists and theoreticians had to deal with the NGOs, their roles, positions, behaviours and dynamics — a phenomenon largely missing a decade ago. Most bilateral agencies engaged in providing development aid have started including NGOs in their framework. The same can be said for multi-lateral institutions and, in recent years, by such bodies as the World Bank (1). National governments throughout the length and breadth of the world, have had to deal with the growing visibility of NGOs, in varying degrees.

Of course, this has also resulted in counter-claims, largely emanating from official machinery, on the one hand, and political power centres, on the other. These

counter-claims decry the work of NGOs as a temporary aberration in societies, as a part of a "global conspiracy" to weaken the State and the political system. In different ways, NGOs, and those who have been working with them and setting them up, have been denigrated as opportunistic, self-serving and hollow. The most profound counter-claim questions the very contribution of NGOs during the last decade by pointing out that they have very little to show as an alternative, and that they are mere "professional dissenters" of all that national and international agencies propose to implement. While the underlying motivations for such counter-claims may be worth pursuing, it is now evident that NGOs occupy a historic and visible presence on the development arena, nationally and internationally.

Another trend which has become increasingly visible in recent years is the growing harassment of those working with the NGOs, and the NGOs themselves, by the State, its agencies, law-and-order machinery as well as vested interests. Physical attacks, malicious campaigns, manipulative undermining and divisive interference are various forms in which this harassment of NGOs and their staff is going on in different parts of the world and more intensively in the countries of the South. Partially in response to the growing international presence and partially in response to the increasing national voice created by NGOs and their networks, national governments have begun to feel the need for measures intended to silence the voice of the NGOs. In a country like India, this has been much more widespread and intense in recent years. It certainly raises questions about the effect of the work of the NGOs which is threatening the status-quo in some way or the other. If local and regional vested interests and ruling elites react, if government officials, agents of the local and national government react, if the law-and-order machinery is used to suppress the freedom of speech and association and the work of NGOs, then it certainly indicates that NGOs are having some effect somewhere.

India is one of the major countries involved in the debate around issues of development and is also a witness to these trends. Indian NGOs have a visible and audible voice. They have been able to establish a significant presence from the local to the national and now also at the international level. Simultaneously, they have been victims of attacks and harassment. Many of these Indian NGOs have pioneered work in areas which were ignored by the process of national development planning. Many of them have become spokespersons and champions of hitherto neglected causes and sectors of population. The entire range of issues related to environment and sustainable development, protection of forests, pollution, occupational health, alternatives to centralised water and power management systems, revitalizing traditional forms of water harvesting - this entire range of issues today can be articulated, debated and proposed by NGOs and their spokespersons. Issues related to women, their work, their rights, their voice against violence and gender discrimination, the rights of the girl child, education of women, leadership and empowerment of the poor are once again being articulated, debated and presented to the society by NGOs. Popularising

science and technology, repropagating indigenous and appropriate technology, on the one hand, and promotion of people's culture and folk forms for education and empowerment of the poor on the other are also the areas where NGOs have contributed some pioneering work. Thus in a country like India, no aspect of the development discourse can be carried forward today without paying attention to the work and the voice of the NGOs.

And yet we know that voluntary initiatives, voluntary action, voluntary work and voluntary organizations have a long chequered and glorious history in this country and the sub-continent. Social reform movements, political movements, movements for liberation of the country - all have derived assistance and strength from voluntary initiative and voluntary action. Historically, all types and forms of voluntary organizations and development promoting institutions have existed, and continue to exist, in India. We have excellent relief and rehabilitation organizations; we have efficient educational and health institutions; we have "new development - agenda" organizations; we have specialized technical assistance organizations; we have a vast array of grass-roots mobilizing, organizing, conscientising groups, social action groups, semi-political groups, local groups, environmental groups; we have a long tradition of youth groups and Mahila Mandals; we have support organizations, networks, federations and associations. In fact, we have all forms and types of voluntary development organizations and actions in this country that may exist anywhere else.

But what has been the history of voluntary organizations? What have been their contributions in the past? What historical factors have facilitated or constrained their growth? What is their contemporary character? What range of roles and initiatives do they encompass? What kinds of tensions, problems and headaches do they create and themselves face? What kinds of innovations made by them have found their way in larger development policies? What is their future? What is the potential for their future contribution? These become the issues and questions raised, in order for us to understand the context in which NGOs and voluntary development organizations have grown and evolved in India.

It is with this **background** in mind that PRIA began to first think about initiating a more comprehensive study of NGOs in India around 1986. Till then, PRIA had developed considerable experience of working with grass-roots NGOs in different parts of the country, and elsewhere. It had established links with many NGOs and their staff; and in the course of that, it had begun to see certain types of experiences, certain patterns, and began to develop some knowledge-base on the dynamics of NGOs, their socio-political context and the problems and challenges they face. Around 1986, PRIA got involved in a larger debate around the question of regulation and control of NGOs. The debate was carried around the question of having a National Council of Voluntary Agencies as a statutory body through an Act of Parliament and a statutory Code of Conduct for voluntary organizations (2). The debate threw up questions

around issues of government regulation and control of NGOs and the role of its funding to NGO activities. It also brought home issues related to recognition and co-optation of NGOs. The Seventh Five Year Plan document (3) gave recognition to voluntary organizations but perhaps also demanded certain restrictions on the nature and form of their work. This background encouraged us to conceptualize a more comprehensive and systematic study and reflect on voluntary organizations in this country. Previous writings and documents on NGOs are useful records in terms of their work in development. It was hoped that a more detailed and comprehensive documentation, analysis and study of NGOs in India could prove fruitful at this juncture. It may be helpful to bring about clarity on the roles they have played in our society, historically and contemporarily. It may be worthwhile to look at those who have initiated such institutions and activities and what has been their experience of institutions and activities and also what has been their own backgrounds, motivations and perspectives which attracted them to such activities? It is also important to understand the historical context in which their vision of social change and transformation is situated? Issues related to funding and control of voluntary agencies were also beginning to emerge around this time. It was felt that a more comprehensive look at these dynamics may bring an understanding about how to deal with them. Several myths and partially constructed notions were also common in the air around NGOs and voluntary organizations and it was felt that the study of this dimension may help clear or confront them.

It was also felt within the NGOs' sector itself, among the NGO leaders and staff of voluntary organizations, within the networks and federations of voluntary organizations, that the time may be ripe to facilitate a wider debate and critique of their own work and contributions. A sort of an internal reflection, a critical look at sectoral, institutional, individual contributions as we stand today is necessary. It was hoped that the very process of such a systematic data-collection, study, analysis and reflection may create conditions for open, ongoing and sustained debate within the NGOs, their staff, leadership, within their networks and associations, on what it means to be a part of this fascinating set of organizations, at this historical juncture. This is the background and the context of the study. This is the set of conditions and forces which prompted us to plan and carry out systematic documentation, study and analysis of the history and roles of NGOs, their contributions and potential in India.

## METHODOLOGY

### Framework

Given the context in which the study was conceptualized, the framework by which further elaboration of the study plan took place and which guided the process of data collection and analysis in the study, it evolved as a consequence of our own experiences, reflections and various other streams of thinking that had been prevalent in development discourse. Some of the more dominant elements of this framework are described below:

1. One of the starting points in understanding any social formation, in a given socio-political context is to look at its over-riding motivation and purpose. Societies like India are constantly being faced with pressures for social transformation and change. There are forces operating which intend to provide a deliberate and clearer direction of social transformation. In the context of widespread poverty, unemployment, destruction of natural resources, displacement and dislocation and galloping population, social transformation in the Indian context entails creation of a framework of equity, justice, equality, social justice alongwith economic growth and progress. It also entails practice of democracy, pluralism, unity in diversity as forms of political formation.

Within this broader definition of social transformation and social change, a variety of actors and forces operate. A large number of individuals are inspired by commitment to do some thing for the society, for their fellow human beings, for their neighbours or others. The source of this commitment invariably lies in their own personal experiences. This social commitment is universal in a given society. As human beings, all of us have some rudimentary, not-so-clearly-articulated or understood form of social commitment - commitment to work for the larger good, improvement of others' lives, to work for the society, the country, the nation. Yet, not all of us find ways to express our social commitment, or to practice it. Most of us, compelled by our circumstances, take on straight -jacket careers and vocations; most others continue to struggle, for the survival of self and the immediate family.

Within this framework, therefore, **various forms of expression of social commitment exist** in any society at any given historic moment. Some of these forms may be legitimized and accepted by the society. Some may be treated as illegitimate. Political parties, trade unions, students' movements, socio-political movements as well as a vast range of individual initiatives carried out locally are different manifestations of

attempts to realise the social commitment towards a meaningful social change. Voluntary development initiatives must, therefore, be situated within this framework as one other form of expression of social commitment.

2. The various forces engaged in social transformation, as well as those engaged in perpetuation of the status-quo in a given society at any historical juncture, constitute important formations within a society. In some contexts, forces engaged in perpetuating the status-quo may not be very cohesive or unified. Under such circumstances, if forces engaged in social transformation are really cohesive, and such forces agree towards a shared minimum vision about a desirable future and appropriate strategies to accomplish that, societies may witness quantum jumps - revolutionary changes. Yet, such dramatic social transformations are not common throughout history. And during those periods where such revolutionary changes are not visible, it will be a mistake to assume that forces towards social transformation are not active. In fact, it is during such periods of not so visible quantum of revolutionary social change that it becomes interesting to understand the motivations and the purposes, the visions and dreams of various actors and clusters of forces engaged in social transformation. In the contemporary context of India, voluntary initiatives represent one such set of forces engaged in social transformation.

3. India became an independent country in 1947 and aspired to become a secular welfare state and chose to adopt the parliamentary democratic set-up. It created a series of constitutional provisions in pursuit of its ideal of a secular, socialist, democratic, sovereign State. During these forty years, various institutions engaged in parliamentary democracy have survived as reflected in periodic elections, selection and rejection of representatives at various levels of governance in the country. Yet, traditions, values, attitudes and practices necessary to support democratic processes throughout the country in its various forms -from the individual to the family, the neighborhood, to organizations and social groups, and society at large - have not yet taken roots in the modern Indian state. It is within this context of such a formal parliamentary democracy that the question of role of voluntary action becomes an intriguing one. In this context where the State has assumed an increasingly important role for itself as promoter of development, as initiator of social change as well as the sole representative of all ideals and developments in the country, what role does organised voluntary action have ? What kinds of relationships do voluntary development organizations evolve with the State and its agencies ?

The modern Indian State in its apparent formal democratic character has not been organically built on, or derived from, the existing civil society, but has been prematurely, deliberately and externally imposed at the turn of independence (4). Therefore, it becomes interesting to examine how the State, and those representing it, respond to the critique and questioning of its policies and programmes - a role most commonly and widespread played by voluntary organizations and NGOs in the country.

4. The initiatives of ordinary citizens in the form of voluntary action, the initiatives of citizen groups, the activities of voluntary development organizations and NGOs are aimed at having an influence in the vision of a desirable society. What, therefore, is the nature of that influence and whom is it aimed at ? In some ways, most voluntary initiatives aim to have influence on ordinary citizens, with the poor, deprived, marginalised and oppressed as their primary constituency. NGOs and voluntary organizations also aim to influence on issues, based on their own analysis, experience and work at the base. These are the issues of health, drugs, water, forestry, human rights, women, tribals, education, literacy, sustainable development and appropriate technology, etc.

In many cases intended, and in many--unintended, one of the consequences of the work of NGOs and voluntary organizations in a country like India has been influence on the policies and programmes of the government at the national, state and local levels. Some of the most dramatic examples of such policy influences have been in the area of education, health, family welfare, women welfare, etc. NGOs have also influenced the general public in their broader public education role, sometimes intended, largely unintended. By taking positions on issues, by highlighting debates and concerns, NGOs do contribute to influence public opinion. **The question is one of the nature and depth of such influences.** Where is this influence most predominant? How does this influence get counter-acted ? What response do others who feel threatened by such an influence give ? What has been the extent of influence of NGOs, their work, and articulation on public policies, either in its implementation or its evolution ? What kind of an intellectual, moral influence do NGOs have on the society ? And how is that countered and dealt with, or confronted by counter-vailing forces? How do other democratic formations and institutions relate to such initiatives ?

5.What has been the character of NGOs? Many critique the very phrase "Non-Governmental Organisation" because it is negative and it does not connote anything. Anything which is not governmental is equated with NGOs - this may include the private sector, commercial service outfits, etc., etc. In the Indian context, the definition becomes all the more problematic. We have terms like voluntary organisation, developmental organisation, voluntary action, citizen action, etc. Does "voluntary" mean honorary ? Historically, voluntary organisations were set up and "staffed" by those who did not derive any pecuniary benefit from it. How meaningful is that definition now ? Should these be treated as a homogeneous category ? What can be the defining variables ?

Certainly, the variable cannot be 'formal registration' only. Any organisation registered as a Trust or a Society under the appropriate legislation in the country does not automatically become the kind of NGO which has been referred to here. Many government sponsored institutions have the same form of registration. Many universi-

ties, higher educational institutions and hospitals have the same form of registration. Many industrial houses have sponsored institutions under similar form of Society or Trust. And, many active and effective voluntary initiatives are not formally and legally registered. So, whom do we include and whom do we exclude ? Is being non-profit a significant enough criteria ? Is the nature of activity the only criteria or the purpose and the manner in which it is carried out ? This obviously is a critical question in order to focus the scope and the reference point of our study and analysis.

6. Finally, it is important to look at the issue of change over time. The phenomenon that we are addressing is dynamic in character. It changes with time, over time; and these changes have to be, therefore, viewed in a historical perspective. The socio-political context and scenario changes over time. In the Indian context, the period from the pre-nineteenth century, to the eighties of this century has witnessed different socio-political trends. These organisations have to be studied in that context. Similarly, the issues and concerns which occupy centre-stage change over time. At one time, issues of social reform/ changes in the social beliefs and practices occupied the central focus of concern in society. Then came the struggle for independence and the work with the untouchables. Agricultural extension, working with destitutes and the handicapped acquired salience immediately following independence; community development, health care, education and other social services began to acquire greater importance subsequently. Then came concerns related to women, tribals, landless, and subsequently environment and sustainable development. Thus, issues and concerns of society change over time.

Likewise, mechanisms and strategies change over time. Organizing a group of housewives to donate blood for those who are struggling for independence was one form of voluntary action in the 1920's. Organising for the release and rehabilitation of bonded labour through struggle and legal action in 1980's, recruiting a young group of professionally trained engineers to plan an alternative watershed management in the 1990's is another.

And finally, resources, and modes of acquisition and use of those resources, have also changed over periods of time. Contributions from industrial houses, from rich philanthropists is one mode; grants from the State is another; contributions from bilateral, multilateral funding agencies is yet another and funds from American Foundations and Northern (largely European and Canadian) NGOs is yet another; raising contributions from within the community and from the general public is yet another form of contribution - of resources, of time, and expertise - these also change over time.

**Therefore, this study is guided by the above elements.** These elements have helped elaborate the objectives of the study, as well as the questions which became the focus of data-collection.

## **General Objectives**

1. To conceptualize the role of NGOs as promoters of development, catalysts of social change and as mechanisms for popular participation in influencing public policy.
2. To explore the future potential of NGOs as actors in public policy formulation and implementation in the country.

## **Specific Objectives**

1. To develop a typology of NGOs based on variety of aims, activities, clients and structures;
2. To understand and analyse the strategy of NGOs and their relationship with the State and public policy;
3. To analyse the organizational forms and strategies of NGOs;
4. To examine the nature of linkages NGOs have with their clients, political parties, support organizations, donors, etc.
5. To develop insights into the future roles of NGOs in India.

## **Research Questions**

The study will focus on the following aspects :

1. NGOs are called by different names in India. They are sometimes referred to as voluntary agencies, sometimes as social work agencies, or social service societies, and sometimes as development groups, social action groups etc., etc. They are also classified as Gandhian, Sarvodaya, Church-related, Marxist etc., etc., Each of these classifications and labels has a distinctive history and meaning. So, this study will explore these types, their history and meaning, and develop a typology of NGOs in India.
2. NGOs have been involved in relief and rehabilitation; they have delivered services like health and education; they promote economic programmes; they build people's organisations; they engage in conscientization. All these different activities have implications for their roles. The study will attempt to critically analyse these roles.
3. The relationship of NGOs with the government and its agencies has been a matter of considerable discussion and concern. Some believe NGOs can, and must, collaborate with government; some others feel it is undesirable. In this study, we will try to examine the history of this relationship and its various facets, positions and contradictions.
4. The relationship of NGOs with political parties, trade unions and federations has also been a matter of great concern. Some believe that NGOs should have an issue-

based collaboration with parties, unions, etc.; others oppose this trend vehemently. Each position is rooted in diverse experiences and assumptions. The study will focus on this aspect too.

5. It has been repeatedly said that small, distant and remote NGOs cannot have a significant influence all by themselves; there is a need for them to come together. Several efforts at NGOs' collaboration and coming together have been made; some have been issue-based; others on a permanent basis. Some of this collaboration has been successful; much of it has been a failure. The study will look into this aspect critically.
6. The linkages between NGOs across national and international boundaries have begun to emerge, off late. The relationship between Indian NGOs and those of the North (Europe, North America) has been another controversial issue. Some critiques have even labelled this relationship as an element in "imperialist strategy"; some others see a broader (i.e., broader than funding alone) relevance of these linkages. It is in this sense that this study will focus on these links.
7. Finally, the study will attempt to outline the potential of NGOs' contribution, given a historical perspective. Based on the foregoing analysis, an effort will be made to assess their future roles in India.

**These are some of the main questions this study has tried to address.**

### **Principles**

The methodology of the study was worked out within the framework of participatory research (5). Specifically this implies the following principles :

1. The phenomena of NGOs and their roles and contributions in society required a dynamic understanding which in turn entailed looking at their reality from different vantage points over a period of time. This demanded creating alternative ways of collecting and analyzing data.
2. It was hoped that the study would be carried out in a way that will encourage reflection on the practice by NGOs themselves. This reflection could be structured through individual interviews and group discussions, as well as through reflections on written documents and case studies. Looking at one's own practice in a historical context was seen as an important principle guiding the methodology of the study.
3. A related and yet distinct principle was to use the study to facilitate an educational experience among those working with and in NGOs. The reflections on practice incorporating new insights and critiquing the knowledge available from outside would hopefully constitute a significant learning experience for all those working in and with NGOs.
4. Another principle which guided the methodology was a systematic and compre-

hensive critique of existing knowledge. A large number of people, institutions, academicians, theoreticians, planners, donors, funders have espoused their own understanding of NGOs in India. This knowledge base needed to be understood and critiqued from the experiences of NGOs themselves. Likewise, various myths and meta-concepts which are active in the development discourse about NGOs needed to be challenged as a part of the process of study.

5. And finally, the study process itself should promote ideas about new actions and practices within the NGO community and its staff. It was hoped that reflections on their existing practices, a review of their historical roles and contributions and an analysis of challenges and problems faced by them would stimulate them to think of new solutions, new actions and new practices. Thus, the study could significantly contribute to stimulating discussion and reflection within the NGO sector, their leadership and staff and those who work with them. To that extent, it was hoped that the study would empower the NGO community as a whole to develop better insights about its own roots and its future potential.

### **Steps in Study**

Based on the above principles, the methods of data collection and analysis were outlined in a sequence of steps. The following provides a brief enumeration of those steps:

1. The first step in the study process was to collect existing documents and materials written on the status of NGOs in India and elsewhere. Though initially planned for three months, this task actually took about nine months. A lot of material was available in mimeo and cyclostyled form and not easily accessible through standard libraries or book-shops. As a result, teams of PRIA staff were sent to several major institutions all over the country to identify, select and collect materials (**Appendix-I**). Once these materials were collected, they were pursued, classified and reviewed. This vast amount of material has been prepared into an annotated bibliography as well as a complete bibliography of all such materials.

This step brought out several insights. The first insight reconfirmed the original rationale of the study. We found that while a lot of items on NGOs were written, they were mostly journalistic accounts of a particular event, activity, programme or individual. Most of them were case-studies of activities or events. Very little was available in the form of historical analysis of the growth and contributions of NGOs in society; and especially issues related to federation, relationship with parties and trade unions and organizational aspects were largely absent from this material.

The task of collection, review and classification of material which led to compilation and annotation of bibliography, has demonstrated that even though materials in different forms were available and a lot had been written about NGOs it was not properly organised, classified or presented. We feel that there may be future interest

in a properly classified, annotated and presented bibliography on this important theme.

Thirdly, we discovered that the framework with which we approached the study had helped us to collect materials which otherwise were not directly focusing on the issues of NGOs, but which brought together materials focusing on social work, philanthropy, welfare functions, relief, rehabilitation, etc. Thus, while collecting, reviewing and classifying materials, we cast our net very wide and we hoped that this would generate a vast amount of material which could then be properly presented.

2. While collection of material was going on, simultaneously efforts were made to seek support from the sector and key individuals in the NGO sector to the study. This was an essential step so that they may not only participate in the study actively, but also find it useful subsequently and the findings of the study could be utilized to generate debate, reflection and analysis within NGOs and across NGOs in the country. An initial letter informing people about the study alongwith outlines of the framework was sent to about 120 NGO leaders and other individuals knowledgeable about this sector. The initial response was overwhelmingly favourable and we narrowed the list to an initial possibility of about sixty interviews. This process of seeking support also brought in additional ideas about issues to be focused upon, emphasis on different aspects of the framework and reference to new materials and additional individuals and organizations to be involved in the study. Informal meetings, consultations and dialogues with several of those who favourably responded helped clarify the purposes of this study, as well as strengthened their support to it.

3. Those who favourably responded were then short-listed for in-depth interviews. As the framework of this study proposes, a very wide spectrum of NGOs and NGO leaders were identified in the initial round. These included old pre-independence, Gandhian relief organizations on the one hand, and modern, development oriented, 7-8 year old NGOs on the other; they included organizations inspired by spiritual faith of different order as well as small, sectorally spread, and also specialized organisations, womens' organizations, support organizations etc., etc. Thus the final list of persons identified for interviews comprised of a wide diversity of NGOs and NGO leaders. A set of interview guidelines were prepared (**Appendix-II**) and teams of persons from PRIA carried out these interviews. The interviews were conducted mostly in the location and setting of the respondent which also gave an opportunity for further familiarization with their work and contexts. Some interviews were also conducted in other locations as per the availability of the person. These interviews were recorded both in written and audio form.

They ended up being sessions for reflection about the person, their own work, history of involvement, changes in orientation and analysis of the NGO he/she was working with as well as the wider sector. Most of these interviews lasted 2-3 hours, several of

them had more than one sitting. The set of questions as guidelines for interviews were sent to these persons in advance in order to help them think about these issues; and to our great surprise many of them had made detailed notes on these, prior to the actual face-to-face interview. Interviews also became occasions for dialogue where the PRIA team shared a bit about our own perception of the sector, our own experiences in it and thus stimulated further reflection and analysis by the respondent. Towards the end of the interview, suggestions for further contact of persons and new ideas, references and materials were also taken. On the whole, the entire experience of collecting data through interviews was extremely satisfying and a positive one and helped build fresh linkages and understanding with those persons and their contexts.

4. Another method of data collection conceptualized in the study was to do an in-depth documentation of select case studies. It was felt that detailed documentation within the framework of the study, of some actual experiences may help bring out special issues, concerns and understanding from the field. An initial list of about 20 such possible organizations and experiences was made. This list comprised of a wide spectrum of institutions in order to bring a wide diversity to the study. It included large and small development--oriented organisations, and geographically spread institutions of varying inspirational faith, with differing periods of history (some as old as hundred years and some as recent as seven); institutions with different roles and functions from the service provision to networking and support functions, etc.

An initial letter seeking their support to and involvement in the study, alongwith the framework of the study was sent to these institutions. The responses from most of them were very favourable and from that list a shorter list was prepared. In the process, the methodology of preparation of case-study got further refined. We ended up creating two types of case-studies. One formed a more in-depth documentation of an aspect of that experience which we thought would specially illuminate certain aspects of this study. The second was a shorter, more focused and limited documentation of one aspect or one dimension of the experience. Thus we ended up having case-studies of the former and 5 cases of the latter variety (Appendix III).

The actual method of preparation of case-study varied considerably. In all cases, PRIA staff were involved, but their roles varied considerably. In some cases, PRIA staff did most of the data collection, systematization and writing. In some others, the data collection and systematization was jointly carried out with people with the experience, while the writing was left to the PRIA staff. In one case, the entire exercise of data collection, systematization and even writing was done by the members of the experience itself, with initial and periodic discussions with the PRIA team. This has obviously brought out the diversity not only on the depth of coverage of various issues but also in the style of writing case-studies. But this has been consistent with the principles mentioned earlier, because in all of these cases, fresh insights about the work have been gained by those involved in it through the process of preparation of

case-study. Draft case-studies were sent back to the organizations for their further review and comment before they were used in the final report.

5. Based on the interviews and case-studies, alongwith the review of material, a preliminary draft of findings was prepared by early 1990. This draft was intended to be used for reflections and discussions in various regional meetings. The size of the draft and the details included in it were kept at a minimum such that they could be used for regional dialogue and debate. Using this draft, which was circulated in advance, five regional meetings were organized (**Appendix - IV**). Most participants invited to these meetings were those who were either not covered by the interview or the case-study. The idea was that this will widen the process of reflection and contribution towards the findings of the study. A whole day of discussion was structured with various sections of the draft being reviewed by the participants. Sharing their own experiences, bringing their own analysis, confirming, challenging or rejecting some of the findings, as the case may be. These debates became interesting occasions for further individual and collective reflections on this theme of NGOs. Several participants mentioned that they had never sat down to think about these aspects. Many suggested that they would like to continue this process of reflection in their own organizations and regions. We have since heard that more than a dozen meetings on this theme have been organized in several districts of the country and at least eight NGOs have used it for debate and reflection within their own organizations. Obviously, this draft was also translated in several languages to facilitate the process of reflection.

This has been a very interesting and, therefore, critical aspect of the entire study process. On the one hand, it has strengthened the analysis and the findings of the study; on the other, it has brought in a process of reflection and analysis in several regions, NGOs and networks which was an important objective of the study itself. Many further discussions on the draft were held with individuals who were not able to attend these meetings or preferred not to do so. These meetings also strengthened the analysis and brought fresh perspectives into the discussions of the issues covered by the study.

Following the debates, reflections and analysis, it is our estimate that the study directly involved more than two hundred and fifty NGOs and about four hundred persons within the NGO sector as well as those knowledgeable about it in the direct process of data-collection, reflection and analysis of the study.

In view of the requirements of the process initiated earlier, it was agreed that a popular draft of the findings would also be prepared and published for wider dissemination, hoping to catalyse further debate and reflections on these issues. This report of the study is a comprehensive document, outlining the framework, the methodology, the findings in considerable detail. The popular version would be a more systematized, shortened and focused version, in order to facilitate its reading and reflection

by field workers of NGOs.

This report, therefore, has been organised in several parts. The first part provides the context of the framework and the methodology of the study. Following this, the findings of this study have been organised in several key sections. The first section, ofcourse, elaborates the history of NGOs, their roles, contributions, and changes. The implications of this history are elaborated subsequently. The second section in the findings focuses on developing a typology of NGOs. This typology is then also utilized to derive implications for NGOs and their work. The issue of Relations with the State as well political parties and trade unions is subsequently covered in another section. Then comes the section on the issue of federating and associations and networks. The next section on organizational issues also contains a sub-section on the issue of funding. The final section of findings examines the contributions of NGOs in influencing public policy.

The last part of this report provides some preliminary inferences and conclusions based on the findings of this study. These are extrapolated to explore future directions, roles and challenges for NGOs in India, including emerging worrisome trends. The section also highlights further areas of examination and analysis to strengthen the work of NGOs and their contributions in our society.

**We invite you to this study.**



## HISTORY

The study has made an attempt to arrive at a classification of the work of NGOs in India today. In order to understand the contemporary classification, a quick look at the history of the work of voluntary development organisations in the country is important.

Though the roots of voluntarism or voluntary action as a concept may be traced to the functioning of social institutions in the ancient period and even outside of social institutions in the medieval period, but, for the purpose of this study, we propose to confine ourselves to the history from the 19th century onwards. It is more important to do so because history from 19th century onwards has more tangible linkages with voluntarism and voluntary action, as it is understood today.

Another aspect which needs explanation, at the outset, relates to our attempt in the following pages to divide the history of this period into seven phases. It is certainly a hazardous attempt but at the same time some kind of classification is necessary in the interest of analysis. While we fully realise that Indian history since 19th century onwards cannot be divided into phases which appear to be water-tight compartments, we expect that the following pages will be taken in stride, in the interest of an attempt at analytical approximation.

### **Phase One**

The first half of the nineteenth century (1800-1850) in Indian history has been marked by the initiation of the social reform movements (6). Some schools of thought consider it as an influence of renaissance, on the Indian elite of that time. A closer look at the history preceding this phase, tends to suggest that the phenomenon of social reform movement was the culmination of a process of assimilation, stirred by the arrival of West Asian socio-political and socio-religious thought about four centuries ago. Such a process in the preceding period had led to the evolution of monotheistic movements (15th century onwards) and development of heterodox groups and sects (late 18th century onwards). Introduction of western ideas and Christian faith by the end of 18th century has in a way precipitated the widespread emergence of social reform movements in this phase.

The work of the Christian Missionaries in modern times as a concerted effort had begun at the fall of the eighteenth century, but the East India Company at that time, was doubtful of its implications on their expansionist designs, and had restricted the operation of missionaries from their territory. The Charter Act of 1813 finally removed

all restrictions on missionary activities in India and provided for the maintenance and support of a Church establishment in British India. This led to the expansion of missionary work in a big way in the area already conquered by the British and led to the creation of conducive environment for British conquest in some areas (particularly tribal areas) where the British had to face resistance. In remote and secluded tribal areas, the missionaries had contributed a great deal by providing their dialects a script and structure and by enhancing their self-conceptualisation and self-esteem as communities. Though the primary objective of the operations of missionaries was the spread of their faith, but to achieve this objective they approached the people through services in the field of education and health.

The influence of the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity on progressive and young sections of aristocracy was quite evident due to their interactions and exposure to such ideas. But at the same time their concern for the eroding base of their indigenous faith had influenced the shape of emerging social reform movements.

While raising voices against discrimination by birth and gender in their faith and practices, the focus of such social movements remained on religion. The formation of Atmiya Sabha in 1815 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy was one such example, which later allied with Christian Unitarians and started the Unitarian Committee in 1821. The arrangement failed precisely due to the concern for the eroding Hindu base and Brahmin Sabha was established in 1828. Swami Sahajanand's Swaminarayana Sect (1800) and Manohar Dharm Sabha (1844) of Gujarat, Paramhans Sabha, Prarthana Sabha, Kalyanonnayak Samaj and Hindu Dharm Sabha in Maharashtra had similar concerns. In Maharashtra, following the lead given by Darpan (1832), a number of periodicals came into existence, the most important of which were Digdarshan (1840), Prabhakar (1841), Dnyanodaya (1842) and Dnyan Prakash (1849). Many literary educational institutions like Royal Asiatic Society (1834) and Dnyan Prakash Sabha (1840) also took shape at this time. In Bengal, Samachar Darpan, Sambad Pravakar, Tattwabodhini Patrika (1843) emerged as well (7).

The Faradi movement of Haji Shariatullah in 1818 among the economically backward classes of Muslims reflected similar concerns in the context of Islam.

There is a plethora of evidence about similar kinds of trends in different regions of British India. The sum total of the influence of such movements during this period of history on the voluntary organisation was :

- (a) recognition of access of untouchables to education, work of choice and worship;
- (b) recognition of access of women to education and other aspects of social life.

The spirit evoked by reform movements of devoting life to do something for the rights of deprived and marginalised had inspired a lot of people in this phase.

## Phase Two

The landmark of the second half of nineteenth century was the failure of what is known as 'first war of independence' in 1857 (8) and its implications on the socio-political milieu. This was also the time of consolidation of British colonial rule over the political and economic life of Indian society. Systematic plundering of resources (e.g., Coal mines in Bengal first in 1820, and second in 1854); creation of communication links across regional boundaries (construction of railways began in 1852); establishment of jute and cotton mills (jute in Calcutta; cotton in Bombay in 1854); spread of English education for induction of people with Indian origin into the lower ranks of the colonial bureaucracy, were highlights of this period.

The combined impact of the above had brought the intelligentsia or middle class to the forefront of socio-political awakening. It was clear with the debacle of 1857 that, in dealing with the colonial rulers, the aristocracy had a minimal role to play. At the same time, the consolidation process was broadening the base of a new middle class. The trends of the first phase also consolidated themselves in institutionalised movements —Brahmo Samaj (by the end of 1878, 124 branches and 21 periodicals were established in India), Arya Samaj (1875), Ramakrishna Mission (1898); Satyashodhak Samaj (1873); Indian National Social Conference (1887); Bombay Presidency Social Reform Association (1897). The outreach of these movements had transcended the linguistic and administrative boundaries of their origin. At the same time, purely political organisations with a limited programme had also started emerging in this period (i.e., Pune Sarvajanik Sabha in Maharashtra and British Indian Association in Calcutta). Literary and educational societies and associations also became a widespread phenomenon. This may have prompted the enactment of Societies Registration Act of 1860. The spread of such literary association contributed to the development of an influential vernacular press, on the one hand, and beginning of alternative (nationalist) education, on the other. Another feature of the period was the emergence of working class organisations (e.g., Bombay Association of Textile Workers came into being). In such a socio-political environment, the Indian National Congress came up as an official platform for the expression of growing national consciousness in 1885.

As a result of the pressure of growing consciousness of the emerging middle class and the requirements of colonial rulers to have the support of a trained stratum of upper and middle class Indians to assist in holding the masses in subjection, alongwith the cautious widening of the quota of posts for Indians in the civil services, a series of reform measures were carried out from 1861 onwards, (Indian Council Act of 1861 and 1892 are examples of that) (9).

During this phase (1850-1900), spread of nationalist consciousness and self-help emerged as the primary focus of socio-political movements and influenced the future course of voluntary action.

### Phase Three

The dawn of present century was marked by territorial tensions among European colonial powers, which culminated into the first world war. Germany and America challenged the British lead and started penetrating even into Indian markets. Indian business and industrial interests gained substantial ground (i.e., by 1898 Bombay itself had 177 Cotton Mills, most of which were owned by Indians).

In the initial phase of the century itself, the nationalist leadership had clearly realised the irreconcilability of Indian people and British colonial interests. They realised that 'in every walk of life, India's loss is England's gain and India's gain is England's loss'.

After a moderate campaign against the division of Bengal, the wave of Swadeshi Movement [10] swept the country during the first decade of the twentieth century. This was the beginning of a mass involvement in the national movement.

The working class had also acquired a nationalist overtone which got expressed in the first political action of working class during 1908 against the trial of Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

As an implication of the Swadeshi Movement and pressures on British economy, the development of Indian capitalist enterprises was accelerated in three major areas:

- (a) large scale enterprises : Tata Iron and Steel Mills (1907), Tata Hydro-Electric Power Supply Co. (1910) and Tata's Cement Company in Kathiawar (1912)
- (b) commercial banking and insurance, Bank of India (1906), Indian Bank (1907) and Central Bank of India (1911)
- (c) handicraft and petty manufacturing (Calcutta Pottery Works 1906)

The influence of extremists over Congress had made 'self-respect and self-confidence' as core values of the movement and relying upon the character and capacity of Indian people as the basic strategy of the nationalist movement. The initial appreciation of 'Benevolent Guidance' and control of English was totally discarded and declaration of 'self-rule' as the goal was made in a clear-cut manner. Extremists got the opportunity to practice their faith in political work among masses and for direct political action of masses during the anti-partition movement.

Flowering of nationalist poetry, prose, journalism and nationalist education was a critical fall out of the movement (e.g., National Council of Education was set up on August 15, 1906).

Consequently, the colonial administration came up with reforms (Morley-Minto Reforms) and presented the Indian Council Act 1909, which introduced an elected majority in the provincial legislature and introduced elected minority into the Viceroy's Legislature Council. By providing for separate representation of the muslim community, it sowed the seeds of separation that eventually led to the lamentable

partition of the country. In 1911, the government announced the cancellation of the partition of Bengal. The Morley-Minto reforms had failed to satisfy the aspirations of the nationalists in India in as much as professedly the reforms did not aim at the establishment of a parliamentary system of government in the country. The Indian National Congress which had so long been under the control of Moderates, became more active during the First World War which began in August 1914.

Some historians claim that in India, the year of the war marked the maturing of nationalism. The war led to the increased misery among the poorer classes of Indians. For them the war had meant heavy taxation and soaring prices of daily necessities of life. Two 'Home Rule Leagues' were started in 1915-16, one under the leadership of B. G. Tilak and another under the leadership of Annie Besant and S. Subramaniyan Iyer. The two Leagues made rapid progress and the cry of Home Rule (Swarajya) or self-government resounded throughout India. The war period also witnessed the growth of the revolutionary movement.

On the other hand, the war offered the Indian business and industrial interests the opportunities for enrichment. The import trade of cotton piece goods was affected by involvement of England in the war and delay in shipping. The cotton industry under Indian control was stimulated by increased demand, and many Indian concerns diverted their activities to engineering and other trades to meet the requirements of army and navy. The peasantry was the major victim, since the war disrupted foreign trade and depressed the prices of agricultural products, mainly cash crops (i.e., England had paid 15 % less for raw Jute in 1916-17 than what they paid before 1914). By August 1918, the prices had increased by 38 % compared to the pre-war period. (The increase in grain price was a phenomenal 93 %). This had hit the toiling people in cities really hard.

Another attempt of appeasement or cooption was made by the Government of India Act 1919 which proposed a two-tier representative system under the Viceroy and Governor.

In the meantime, Mahatma Gandhi made his entry into Indian political arena by first setting up the Sabarmati Ashram at Ahmedabad in 1916, the involvement in the Champaran Satyagrah (1917) and Ahmedabad Mill strike in 1918.

The year of 1919 was quite significant for the Indian national movement. In March 1919, the Rowlatt Act was passed, even though every single Indian member of Central Legislative Council opposed it. The 1919 reforms had also failed to satisfy the people. Massive protests occurred across the country with the involvement of people from all walks of life. April 13, 1919 was the Black Day when the Jalianwala Bagh massacre took place. The year ended with the All India Khilafat Conference held at Delhi in November 1919, and sowing the seeds of the non-cooperation movement, which was formally launched on August 31, 1920. The response went beyond the imagination of the leadership and climaxed in the killing of 22 policemen in Chauri

Chaura village in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh. Subsequently, Gandhiji withdrew the agitation.

The period after this saw the growth of sectoral organisations of different ideological shades within the Indian National Movement (i.e., All India Youth Congress, AITUC and Kisan Sabha) and a number of radical groups (e.g., Chandra Shekhar Azad's Hindustan Socialist Republic Association, etc.)

Gandhi came back to politics in 1928 and in 1929 the goal of 'Purna Swaraj' was made top priority in Congress's agenda and the tricolour was hoisted on December 31, 1929. Gandhi was urged to start a mass movement - a non-violent civil disobedience movement.

This was the period of the ensuing general crisis in the world economic order (1929-35). Indian business and industrial interests which had gained substantial grounds by then had also started shifting gears. Business organisations like FICCI had openly called for support to "strengthen the hands of those who are fighting for Swaraj". With the famous Dandi march on March 12, 1930 began the phase of the Second Civil Disobedience Movement. Then, began the era of Round Table Conferences (March 1931, September 1931, November 1932) which led to the passing of the Government of India Act, 1935 prescribing a federation, taking the provinces and Indian states as units. Subsequently, Congress ministries were formed in seven provinces in July 1937 and later Congress formed coalition governments in two more provinces. The period between 1935 and 1939 witnessed a growth of socialist ideas and the congress socialist party was formed in 1934 (11).

The year 1939 marked the beginning of the Second World War. Without consultation with Indian leaders, India was made party to the war. This, along with the fact that British did not declare its war aims, upset Congress leaders who resigned in protest. Meanwhile, the outbreak of the war and the external circumstances forced the British government to realise the urgency of solving the Indian constitutional problem and fulfill the demand to frame a constitution by the people of India. This was followed by the Cripps Mission - with proposals of the British government on framing a new constitution for autonomous India, to be agreed by the two major political parties (Congress and Muslim League) - whose proposals were rejected. This was followed by the Quit India Campaign launched by the Congress in August 1942. The success of this movement demonstrated to the British that the support base of the Congress was very strong and that the masses of India were now at the forefront of the struggle for independence, and opposed to the 'Imperialist Raj'. Following the deliberations of the Cabinet Delegation (1946) and the Mountbatten Plan (1947), the Indian Independence Act was passed in 1947 which spelt out that from August 15, 1947, there would be two independent dominions, to be known as India and Pakistan.

The major factor in the history of this phase which influenced the arena of voluntary action in future has been the successful attempt of channelising the voluntary spirit

for political action and mass mobilisation for the struggle of Independence.

The second factor was Gandhi's initiation of 'Constructive Work' activities between 1922-28, when he had withdrawn from active politics. This later on became part of the mass national movement and contributed to the creation of a number of Khadi and Village Industries efforts in the pre-independence era. India's mission after independence for those who shared this perspective was village reconstruction - re-establish traditional handicraft industries that had succumbed to cheaper machine-made goods from abroad and rooting out social evils, particularly untouchability, illiteracy and debilitating habits such as drunkenness and drug-taking.

#### **Phase Four**

The fourth phase of voluntary initiatives thus starts after independence. The first 20 years of independence, till mid 60s, may be termed as the phase of nation-building. Many in the stream of social reform based voluntary action and the stream of constructive work joined together in the governments' responsibilities and tasks of nation-building. This task focused on extension work in the field of agriculture, health and on community development, etc. It led to the governmentalisation of Khadi and Village industries. It also resulted in co-optation and formalisation of the work that was initiated both in the areas of education and health and also in areas of economic activities (through State sponsored cooperative movement).

Some others from the stream of social reform based voluntary action after independence found their expression in social work and in the institutions of higher education such as SNDT and TISS in Bombay - set up for training young people in social work. The underlying perspective of social work continued to remain the same 'to provide help to the needy' by starting with the analysis of the need and focusing on a welfarist approach. Another expression of social reform- based stream continued in programmes in the field which focused on relief, rehabilitation, welfare and charity.

The work of the missionaries gained further spread in this phase after independence with new institutions of education and health being set-up in different parts of the country. The primary emphasis continued to be in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, parts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and tribal areas of central and eastern India. This was also the period which saw the social programmes of various dioceses getting established under the overall perspective developed by the work of missionaries before independence.

#### **Phase Five**

The next phase could be seen between the mid sixties to the early seventies. This was the period when the development model followed by the government was critiqued and evidence about the failure of that approach of development and the trickle-down theory began to show (12). Despite their professed aim of carrying out elaborate developmental and welfare functions, the elected government during this

period were able to establish only a token administrative presence at the village level. The contradictions between the rich and the poor, and the divide between the urban and rural had increased during the past 20 years of independence. By the late 1960's, India was caught up in a dual crisis of economic stagnation and political instability. It was at this stage that **alternative and integrated rural development** began to be experimented with, through the initiatives taken by a new generation of people in 1968-69. The response to droughts and floods caused the motivation. The liberation of Bangladesh and the gigantic task of rehabilitation of refugees and the people of Bangladesh also saw many young people join this effort. Part of the motivation of this period also came from the changed political circumstances with the defeat of the Congress in several state assemblies in 1967 and the gaining momentum of the students movement in the 1967-69 period. This was also the period when the 'Naxalite' movement (13) surfaced and gained momentum and reached its peak in 1969-70 period. This was the period of development of a progressive alliance, by the split of the Congress Party, with a more socialist, populist, and human face of the ruling party emerging. The new professionally trained youngsters also began to enter voluntary development organisations setting up new initiatives during this period, though their numbers were very restricted and localized near the metropolitan areas of Madras, Calcutta, Bangalore, Delhi, Trivandrum and Bombay.

### **Phase Six**

The next phase is the period from the clamping of National 'Emergency'(14) in 1975, though its roots began in the 1974 J.P. movement (15). This was the period when the circumstances had forced a number of people to reflect upon their experiences or look back critically at the emerging trends in the country's political process. The rise and fall of the Janata experiment between 1977 and 1979 was quite a disillusioning experience for many. All those who came to form the Janata Party united only on one point -to fight the Congress and kept on harping against the personalised politics of Indira Gandhi and the excesses under Sanjay Gandhi. Since the party did not take any clear stands on important policy issues -economic, political or foreign policy, it could not remain in power for very long. The glitter of a socialist, populist and human face had become a thing of past so soon. The process of politicisation of the post-independence generation which began during the 1967-69 period was almost shattered by 1979. This had left many restlessly looking for constructive alternatives to channelise their energies and concerns in order to realise their dreams for a more humane and just society. This fall out from the political process contributed to the growth in voluntary action, both in terms of quality and quantity.

This was the period when ideas about conscientization and people's participation began to emerge. This was the period when more focused work with target groups, landless labours, tribals, small farmers, women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, dalits, etc., also became the basis for the programme of work of voluntary

organisations. With the growth in number and scope of voluntary agencies, sectoral specialisation in health, agriculture, education, literacy, etc., also gained momentum during this period.

### Phase Seven

The phase of the 80's witnessed a growth in voluntary action at other levels, in the form of support organisations specialising in training, research, advocacy, documentation, legal aid, etc. Issues like women's development, environment, forestry, etc., began to gain significance. The work of voluntary organisations also began to get organised around issues and campaigns related to droughts, floods, deforestation, land alienation, bonded labour, housing rights, water, pollution, etc. The recognition and visibility of the work of voluntary organisations also increased during this period. A more professional approach to development characterised the work of voluntary organisations in this period.

This was the period which gave rise to professionally trained social workers from different academic institutions joining the sector of voluntary action. The distinction of this trend had been that such people in a way took to voluntary action as a profession and tried to find ways for matching their social commitment with a profession.

One more trend of this period which needs mention was that of people from specialised disciplines like medicine, engineering, science and management joining the field of voluntary action. The implication of these two trends on the culture of the voluntary sector will be discussed later in this study.

The above description seems to suggest that voluntary action in different parts of India was rooted in a specific socio-political context and was inspired by the emergence and **continuity of social reforms, social change and political movements in different parts of the country**. The constructive work and political struggle agenda for independence, popularised by Mahatma Gandhi became the basis for voluntary work and voluntary organisations in several parts of the country before independence. Student movements in different parts of the country in the mid 60's also formed the basis for strengthening voluntary work and organisations. Occurrence of major disasters like droughts, cyclones and floods also attracted a large number of people to get into relief or rehabilitation activities which later got transformed into more holistic developmental initiatives. Continuity is also visible in those parts where social movements from the mid 19th century have continued to occur till the contemporary times. An interesting example is the activity of the voluntary organisations in the Telangana region following the Telangana uprising during the mid 20th century. All along this period, Christian missionary based voluntary action had also matured beyond the boundaries of church compounds and began to emerge in extension and conscientization and organisation of marginalised people in various parts of the country.

Essentially, these were the factors which provided conducive conditions for the rise and growth of voluntary organisations during the last 40 years. Socially inspired and committed youth began to seek an expression of their commitment through the work of voluntary organisations just as they saw that expression through the work in political parties. Over this period of four decades, the gap between those who stayed in political parties and those who moved out to set-up or work in voluntary organisations has substantially increased. Thus after the decline of the Naxalite movement in early 70's, many young people who were part of that movement came out and set-up voluntary organisations in different parts of the country. A similar phenomenon was visible in the late seventies when several young people who were part of the J.P. Movement and Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini moved out to set up voluntary organisations while others remained in the Janata Party.

Another stream of voluntary organisations are those set-up by established business/industrial houses in India. Historically, they have played a role in charity--helping the needy. Education and Health have been two sectors of focus for such efforts too. During the past 30 years or so, some have also started rural development projects. In recent years, these organisations have been criticised as instruments to siphon-off funds by the rich from their existing business incomes to save income tax.

Certain charitable and "help the needy" activities have always been carried out by various religious organisations in the country. They have occasionally focused on health and education, though mostly engaged in religious preachings. Some organisations have also worked towards supporting people's struggle to protect and safeguard their basic human, civil and political rights.

What started off as social work (or service to mankind) with a focus on charity has now veered towards developmental work and community mobilisation. There has been a proliferation of voluntary organisations across the board, each with its specific perspectives, priorities and strategies.

## **TYPOLOGY**

The experience of voluntary development organisations and other non-governmental organisations in India has become so diverse and multifaceted that there is a need to systematise and classify this vast range. In some ways the label "non-governmental organisations (NGO)" is a negative, non-explanatory label. Under this label, private sector institutions and a host of other formations are being included. In our experience, the use of the term 'voluntary development organisation' tends to connote this category of formations somewhat better; though there is also considerable debate about the meaning of the word "voluntary" or "voluntarism" in the contemporary context. It has nothing to do with being honorary, which may have been its historical roots; it has to do more with a combination of self-initiative and social commitment.

In the light of the kinds of issues referred to earlier in the framework, therefore, any attempt to build a typology of voluntary organisations in the country today must start by specifying what kinds of organisations this typology is all about. Let us start by identifying the kinds of formations which are excluded in our scope. The first category of formations which are excluded are local hamlet, village or slum-based formations. These have been variously called Youth Clubs, Mahila Mandals (Women's Groups), or self-help units, credit groups etc., etc. The second category which is excluded are what can be broadly called people's movements or struggles. These are workers' movements, tribals' movements, women's movements, peace movements, human rights movements, etc.; some of which are temporary and some more long-term. A third category of formations which are excluded are what could be commonly called ultra-formations: Naxalites, AISSF, JKLF, ULFA, and other such political formations (16). Many government agencies and departments and para-statal institutions and autonomous bodies extensively engaged in developmental activities and set-up to promote the same are also excluded from the scope (for example, Tribal and Women Development Corporations, Welfare Boards, etc.). Many NGOs acting as funding agencies of the National and International origins are also excluded from the scope of this study (like CARE and Oxfams).

Therefore, what is included in the scope of this typology ? Development oriented voluntary organisations are the focus of the typology. These are non-profit institutions. Many of them are registered under the Societies or the Trust Act, though a large number remain formally un-registered. We are including ostensibly authentic organisations, not those which are deliberately fake or a cover-up for something else. Religious institutions set-up to promote a particular religious thinking and practice are not included in this. Similarly, trusts set-up by business houses with a view to transfer

funds are not included. Consultancy firms for profit, development research institutions and groups (like A.N. Sinha Institute or Tata Energy Research Institute) are also not included in the scope of this typology.

The purpose of evolving a typology is to attempt a classification of the range of voluntary development organisations in India today. The typology is intended to be descriptive, and not prescriptive. It is an attempt to describe (through certain categories) what exists. The typology is also exploratory and evolving, and not water-tight. In some significant ways, the purpose of evolving this typology is to attempt differentiation between one type of voluntary organisation with another and to understand implications of these differences. In some ways, the typology is already being used in practice by those within voluntary organisations and those who relate to them. They all describe voluntary organisations in different ways, in different categories and differentiate one from the other on the basis of certain dimensions and parameters. Therefore, what follows is an attempt to classify voluntary organisations in India today on certain dimensions which have both a descriptive as well as an analytical value in enhancing our understanding of the nature and functioning of such organisations.

In our analysis, we discovered that no single unitary parameter is enough to provide the basis for understanding the wide range of voluntary organisations that exist in India today. So, we need many different parameters. In our experience, there are **three main parameters** that tend to distinguish in some significant ways the voluntary organisations existing in India today.

### **1. Inspiration**

One of the most important sources of differentiation in voluntary organisations is the nature of the inspiration of the Founder(s). This inspiration provides the philosophical perspective as well as an analytical framework in viewing the social reality and thereby becomes the basis for evolving a set of actions by a given voluntary organisation. The inspiration takes various forms - it may be philosophical, intellectual, religious, or ideological inspiration. Different inspirations have quite different implications for the manner in which these organisations get established and the manner in which they function. Some of the common types of inspiration are described below.

Historically, one of the most significant inspirations has been the **Gandhian School** built on the experience of the freedom struggle and Gandhi's call for constructive social work, to help the rural masses achieve their own economic, social and moral regeneration. Gandhian inspired voluntary organisations practice a set of norms and values in the conduct of the organisation and design certain specific targets and strategies for themselves. The keystone of such organisations has been village reconstruction - to re-establish traditional handicraft industries and create pride in 'swadeshi' or Indianess (see box on Sewapuri for illustration).

## SEWAPURI CASE

Sewapuri is the name of a place in the district of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh which today represents the history of a unique institution inspired by Gandhian philosophy of constructive social work. The first organisation set up here was Gandhi Ashram on November 15, 1946. Inspired by the call of Mahatma Gandhi to work in rural areas, several activists of the freedom struggle settled in Sewapuri to initiate the work of Gandhi Ashram. In the initial years, it focused on Khadi and village industries, health and nature cure, agriculture and livestock. In 1951, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi was also founded in this area to promote other activities focused on eradication of leprosy, provision of sanitary facilities and promotion of basic education.

Subsequently in 1956 another organisation was formed in Sewapuri called Saghan Kshetra Vikas Samiti which was primarily engaged in training of artisans and promotion of Agro-industry in the rural areas. Employment generation became the main focus in this programme. Over the years, the work of Sewapuri has resulted in evolution of several principles of voluntary action inspired by the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. Non-violence and local self-reliance are the basic themes. At the same time, keeping away from village conflicts and politics and distancing from political groups, non-interference in government functioning etc., also evolved as principles of work in the Sewapuri experience.

A second school, also historically quite active, is what could be called a **socialist school**. This inspiration can be best typified in the leadership of Purushottam Das Tandon, Ram Manohar Lohia and Jaya Prakash Narayan. The influence of this inspiration can be seen in the waves of voluntary organisations which emerged out of the political struggle, and student movement, etc. Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, as an outcome of the J.P. movement in Bihar and other parts of north India during mid 70s is a typical example of this inspiration.

A third inspiration is the **Marxist and neo-Marxist perspective**. Several persons inspired by this perspective left political parties for a variety of reasons to set up voluntary organisations and gave them an initial meaning from this ideological standpoint. Some people who were involved in ultra-left movements, like the Naxalite struggle, after some time changed their course and also set-up voluntary organisations. Within the Church, the Marxist perspective among some clergy and a debate on liberation theology also inspired several voluntary development organisations in the country.

Historically, the Church has been a major source of inspiration and the teachings of

Christ have been used to inspire whole generations of missionaries to serve the poor and the needy. Among the contemporary configuration of voluntary organisations, a large number of people and institutions continue to receive inspiration from Christian thought. Likewise, the influence of Islamic, Buddhist and other traditions has also been quite visible. One of the most interesting inspirations of this type is reflected in the Rama Krishna Mission (17) and its various development initiatives throughout the country. Its contemporary version is a voluntary development organisation-the Lok Shiksha Parishad (see box for details). In several parts of the country, inspiration for the Founder(s) of voluntary organisations came from such social thinkers and reformers as Mahatma Phule, Dr. Ambedkar and the whole tradition of Dalit inspiration to work for the down-trodden.

### **LOK SHIKSHA PARISHAD CASE**

Lok Shiksha Parishad is an organisation founded by Ramakrishna Mission. Ramakrishna Mission was founded in 1897 by Swami Vivekananda, the chief disciple of Ramakrishna, known as Paramhans. His preachings in 19th century West Bengal provided a rallying point for Social Reform Movement at that time. The movement was centred around the concept that to serve a man is to serve the God. Swami Vivekananda founded Ramakrishna Mission with the purpose of preparing young persons to dedicate themselves to the service of God by serving humanity. Building of skills of different trades, appropriate values and ethics and insertion into social service programmes in rural and urban areas were the strategies used for the preparation of young people by Ramakrishna Mission.

In the early days, Ramakrishna Mission continued to engage in charity, relief, rehabilitation, serving the poor and the needy, etc. In 1956-57, Ramakrishna Mission shifted its headquarters to a part of rural area just outside Calcutta and created a separate wing for integrated rural development which came to be known as Lok Shiksha Parishad. This Parishad has been promoting a variety of integrated development efforts in rural areas around issues of health, education, economic activities, etc.

Inspired by the vision of Ramakrishna Mission over the years, Lok Shiksha Parishad evolved into a multi-purpose, multi-faceted institution. It has Gram Sevak Training Centres, Leadership Training Institutions; it is implementing Antyodaya scheme and has agricultural training, Youth training under Nehru Yuval Kendra scheme, Shramik Vidyapeeth and training for NSS volunteers. The Parishad has a field programme also, spread over 12 districts covering 1500 villages, primarily in the state of West Bengal. The understanding of the preachings of Vivekananda on rural development has become the basis for their programmes, though

in recent years the Parishad has been implementing a large number of government sponsored schemes as mentioned above. Most of the leadership of the Parishad comes from those trained by the Mission and therefore are inspired by the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. The orientation to the philosophy of the Mission is also provided to all those who have been working in the Parishad. Thus, selection of senior leaders, perpetuation of certain values and culture, the motivation and commitment of its key staff continue to be based on the inspiration provided by the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda as interpreted on the basis of the preachings of Ramakrishna Paramhans.

In recent years, a new intellectual inspiration has also guided the work of voluntary organisations in India. This could well be called a developmentalist orientation which attempts to look at problems of development in a dominant techno-managerial perspective and utilises inputs of technology and management, finance and credit to solve problems of development.

One could add a vast array of such inspirations. The central point is that all voluntary organisations are founded on the basis of certain inspiration - ideological, philosophical, religious, intellectual. This inspiration comes with the founder(s). This inspiration tends to structure the priorities and the preferences of the organisation, its strategies of work as well as its ways of functioning. In some significant ways, the inspiration remains with the Founder(s) and need not be reflected in the perspective and thinking of all those who may be working in the organisation at a given point in time. Therefore, it is possible that the entire membership of the voluntary organisation does not share this perspective or that this perspective is not coherently translated in the daily practice and programmes of the organisation. Increasingly, differences across these perspectives are getting blurred and "pure types" are becoming difficult to locate. Yet, historically, these different inspirations have been a basis for separate networking among like-minded voluntary organisations as well as have been the reasons for conflicts and distance between those inspired from different traditions and perspectives. Yet, as an example of expression of social commitment, voluntary development organisations do differ on the basis of the original inspiration of its Founder(s) and the perspective they bring.

## 2. Rationale

The second parameter could be called the rationale for initiating voluntary action. It is almost like a world-view or an underlying assumption of why a voluntary initiative is needed. It is almost like a statement of belief from the Founder(s)

about what needs to be done in the society for an appropriate change to occur. If we examine the range of voluntary organisations in the country today, four distinct types emerge under this parameter.

The **first** type is based on the rationale **that people need help**, that poor, down-trodden, weak need assistance and help. They need material assistance and resources, they need assistance of knowledge and ideas and skills; but the fact they are poor is because they have not had the help. This help or assistance could be temporary, during times of extreme crises or hardship; or this help could be perpetual. Most voluntary organisations operating on a charity and welfare perspective carry this rationale. Most organisations providing relief and rehabilitation during events of disaster, droughts, cyclone, floods, earth-quake, etc., also operate on this underlying assumption. They tend to treat members of the community as incapable and resourceless; their activities include transfer of skills and resources, they also include provision of assistance based services like mid-day meals, food kitchens, clothing, shelter, medicines, etc.

The **second** type comprises a world-view which could be called **developmentalist**. Here the focus is on people who could do it on their own but with "our" support, particularly that support in the form of programmes, resources, ideas and skills. It is under this category that we may place programmes of health, education, agriculture, irrigation, forestry, economic activities, appropriate technology, etc.

The **third** type is based on the **theme of empowerment**. It assumes that the poor need to get organised and struggle in order for appropriate change to occur. The focus of intervention, therefore, becomes on the conscientisation and organisation of certain sections - poor tribals, dalits, landless, women, etc. The ultimate purpose of the strategy is empowerment. The struggle of the poor may be catalyzed through a variety of activities which may focus on acquisition of assets, wages, implementation of certain progressive legislations, education, etc., etc.

And finally, the **fourth** type believes in the **need for support and influence at different levels** not merely struggle by the poor directly and their organisations; but struggle at the level of influencing policy; struggle at the level of ideas, struggle at the local, district, state, national and international levels. This perspective assumes that with growing internationalisation of our societies and economies, forces of oppression and marginalisation operate from different levels and need to be countered and confronted at those levels. Therefore, the support and influence will take different forms at different levels. It is here that institutions engaged in advocacy, research, networking, documentation, training, federating, etc. come into the picture. (see box on Support Organisation)

## SUPPORT ORGANISATION

A new form of organisation has been emerging among the voluntary development organizations in India as well as in other parts of the world. These have been variously called Support Organizations, Resource Organizations, Intermediary Organizations etc., These organizations essentially provide support to strengthen the work of grassroots voluntary development organizations, peoples' movements and other individuals engaged in voluntary development initiatives. The various functions played by such organizations include research, training, advocacy, technical assistance, information dissemination, documentation, etc.

These organizations are not merely service-providing organizations in a commercial sense of the word; they are support organizations as they share the wider goals of social change with grassroots voluntary development organizations. They consider themselves as part of the wider movement of voluntary development organizations in India and play their role within that framework. Such support organizations have a world-view, their own vision of a new society and share basic philosophical perspectives on social transformation and change in our society with other grassroots voluntary development organizations. The role of support organizations in the Indian context has only emerged recently and these have, therefore, begun to have their own legitimacy and make their own contributions gradually.

These four types tend to describe a wide-variety of programmes and activities that voluntary organizations undertake. More than that, they tend to describe the basic underlying world-view or rationale of those programmes and activities. Therefore, we find that a health programme carried out with the first rationale of 'help' tends to provide medicines and treatments, while another one carried out with the rationale of 'development' tends to educate people and solve other non-health related problems in an integrated manner. Therefore, these distinctions are important not merely in their underlying belief but in the outcome as reflected in the manner in which programmes and activities are carried out by such voluntary organisations.

Further differentiation does occur on the basis of the strategy of intervention. For example, some organisations focus on one sector, like health, education, income-generation, forestry, etc. Some organisations are multi-sectoral or integrated in their approach. Some organisations focus on one constituency - let us say, tribals or landless in a given geographical area. Some organisations focus on multiple constituencies. These variations of sector and constituency also get further amplified within the rationale and the world-view described above. Thus, it is

possible to find different types of voluntary organisations, carrying out the same sectoral work with similar constituencies but having totally different orientation, approach and activities. It is important, therefore, to keep this distinction in mind because this tends to explain the differences that occur among voluntary organisations.

### 3. Size

In our experience, size has become one of the main parameters which explains the differences among voluntary development organisations. Size can be classified in various ways. One dimension of size is the area of coverage. Many organisations are very local, covering one or two villages or slums; some are national in their coverage. Related to the question of coverage is the size in terms of full-time and part-time staff and the over-all budgets and resources.

The question of size cuts across the previous two parameters and can be seen as an independent parameter describing the range of voluntary organisations and, therefore, the nature of their functioning. It is possible to develop various categories within this parameter of size, but four such categories seem to make more sense.

The first category of **small** organisations is the most predominant one in the Indian context. These are the organisations which work in a few villages within a block of a district or in a few slums in one part of the city. They have generally many part-timers, volunteers and a few (may be two or three) full-time staff. Most of their funds are based on local resources, some contributed by members of the organisations themselves, though they may occasionally receive some funds from outside on an informal or intermittent basis.

The second category of **medium** size organisations tends to cover a block or two in rural areas or several slums in a city and could also cover larger canvas if the nature of their work is at other levels than grass-roots. They may have about ten full-time staff and an on-going project budget based on project grants from national or international sources in the range of about rupees one lakh per year. Their number is also fairly large in a country like India.

The third category of **big** organisations would be those who employ between 25 - 50 full-time staff at different levels and have project budgets varying from 5-20 lakhs rupees per annum. They cover wider area, several districts or cities and they operate on a regular programme basis.

The last category could be called **large** size organisations which are fewer in number in India today. They would have staff size in the range of 100 or more and a budget around or above rupees fifty lakhs per annum based on project grants from several sources.

Various dimensions about the nature of voluntary organisations and the issues they experience get determined by this parameter of size and its implications on their functioning.

The above three broad parameters - i.e., **Inspiration, rationale, and size**, can be used to classify various voluntary organisations active in India today. It is possible to see all types of combinations exist in the country today. Different inspirations get translated into different sizes; it is possible to find all types of sizes for all types of inspirations; even the world-view and rationale may vary among the different sizes as well as within the same size. All four types of world-views and rationales could be seen in all types of sizes.

What is the **implication** of such a classification ? It should be mentioned that such a classification will help us describe and understand the nature of voluntary organisations in India today. But all these 'pure forms' need not exist in reality. Increasingly, we are finding that world-views are being combined; size changes over time; and inspirations alter as people grow and develop. So it may be difficult to find 'pure types' in each of these categories. But it is useful to keep this classification in mind when we examine further issues with respect to voluntary organisations in the country.

The **first** implication of this classification is that when world-views or rationales are mixed within a single organisation, it creates confusions about identity. When an organisation based on the rationale of help and charity also takes on a developmental perspective, different segments and people within the organisation behave and react differently, thereby causing internal tensions and confusion externally. This is not to imply that mixing world-views is undesirable, but to understand that issues of identity--confusion across roles and functions may well be caused because of two or three different world-views or rationale have been combined within the framework of a single organisation.

The **second** implication is that the nature of the world-view and rationale for setting-up an organisation may end up defining its relations with others in society. In fact, this rationale or world-view tends to provide a definite space to voluntary organisations in the socio-political arena of the country. Their relationship with the government, with the political parties, with trade unions, with other voluntary organisations, etc., may get determined on the basis of rationale or the world-view of a particular voluntary organisation. For example, those set-up with the rationale of help may find no conflict with the government or the political parties, while those set-up with the rationale of empowerment may find themselves in conflict with both. Different rationales and world-views among different sets of voluntary organisations may make it difficult for them to come together around common issues. It is useful, therefore, to keep in mind that world-views and rationales influence the nature of relationships an organisation has with others in the society.

## A F P R O CASE

Following the serious drought and shortage of water in many parts of the country in early and mid 60's, a unique institution called "Action for Food Production" (AFPRO) was set-up in mid 60's primarily with a view to provide drilling for water facilities. Over the years, AFPRO has evolved into a technical support institution in areas of agriculture, land management, drinking water, irrigation, biogas, livestock, etc. It has a staff with diverse technical backgrounds and has been able to provide a wide-range of technical support services to grassroots voluntary organisations as well government agencies in different parts of the country.

The original support to the idea of AFPRO came in close association with people who were active in the Church and many of its representatives were on the board and staff of AFPRO. This inspiration of service to the people as a form of service to Christ and God was predominant in its early days of providing drinking water in drought affected areas of the country. Over the years, with a new generation of professionals and technical staff joining AFPRO, that link with the original inspiration is not visible in its daily practice.

A **third** implication is that growth in size implies several institutional demands and forces which are different from other parameters. And that independent of inspiration and rationale for setting-up of an organisation, growth in size brings similar pressures and demands. Is it possible to say that all large voluntary organisations look and behave alike irrespective of world-views and inspirations ? And that all small ones would face similar tensions and difficulties ?

The previous section on elaborating the history and evolution of voluntary organisations has clearly highlighted the significance of understanding regional variations in a country like India. Regional variations have affected evolution of types of organisations as well. Certain inspirations are more available in certain parts of the country. For example, the western region of the country is full of voluntary organisations inspired by a Gandhian perspective. Inspiration of Mahatma Phule is most visible in Maharashtra and that of Dr Ambedkar (and Dalit) in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The history of evolution indicated that a number of larger size voluntary organisations evolved more in states like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, than Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. So it is useful to keep in mind the effect, regional variations in the historical evolution of voluntary organisations has, on the types that dominate in those regions.

And **finally**, it is important to keep in mind that the personality of the Founder(s) of voluntary organisations has a paramount influence. It is the influence coming

from their inspiration, their world-view and rationale, as well as their capacities for size that determine the shape of voluntary organisations. In some ways, the influence of the founder(s) and the leaders in such social change organisations may be the most dominant influence and has the most visible impact.

These and many other implications of the classification of the above type would help us explore in greater depth the kinds of roles, functions and potential that voluntary organisations have in a country like India. (see issue box below).

## MOTHER INSTITUTIONS

Several Voluntary Organisations throughout history, in particular over the last 20 years, have played a role which could be called that of a **Mother Institution**. It is the role whereby people and ideas spread to other voluntary organisations and become a basis for new initiatives. People who spend time in such Mother Institutions move out to create new voluntary organisations and these mother institutions become a learning ground, an experimentation place, an ideas' place, an orientation place for another set of voluntary organisations. Not that any of these organisations deliberately or intentionally wanted to play the role of Mother Institution. But looking back, one can see how this role got played by them. Several examples can be cited and each one differs in the manner in which this role got played.

The first one is **Sewa Mandir** set up in 1969 by Dr. Mohan Sinha Mehta, a well known educationist of Udaipur, in Rajasthan. The institution was set up to promote Rural Development and Adult Education and similar activities with the poor tribals of southern Rajasthan. Over a period of time, a large number of individuals worked in Sewa Mandir and moved out to set up their own institutions, some within the district of Udaipur and some within the state, and some beyond, some doing the work at grassroots levels similar to what Sewa Mandir started, some working at grassroots level but with different perspective; and some working at other levels.

The second institution similar to this is **Rayalseema Development Trust (RDT)** in Anantpur, Andhra Pradesh. Set up in mid 60's, the Trust attracted a large number of youngsters from states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to work for the poor around questions of famine, food-for-work, integrated development, education, etc. And a large number of those left RDT after a few years of work to set up their own organisations in different parts of the South. Many new organisations of considerable repute and credibility have emerged out of those who spent a few years learning in RDT.

Another model of Mother Institutions is **SWRC (Social Work and Research Centre)** also set up more than 20 years ago in Tilonia, Rajasthan. Several youngsters from all over the country came to SWRC, Tilonia to get a feel of rural development and many were encouraged to go back to their own regions and states and set up similar institutions. By early 80's, many SWRCs were functioning in states like Himachal, Haryana, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, etc. They all carried the name of SWRC initially and after a period of time changed their name and identity. But SWRC, Tilonia was the base from where they learnt some ideas about rural development.

Another example of a Mother Institution is **SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association)**. The initial work of SEWA in the 70's became so visible and innovative that many other organisations in different parts of the country wanted to imbibe its philosophy and perspective in their own work. They sought affiliation with SEWA, and also got registered as SEWAs in different parts of the country like Delhi, U.P., Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, etc. SEWA in Ahmedabad, therefore, became a Mother Institution to many of the people working in these organisations who subsequently tried to imbibe the philosophy, perspective and strategy of SEWA, Ahmedabad.

These and many such institutions have, therefore, contributed in significant ways in propagating certain ideas and approaches to working with issues of development as well as the very concept of voluntary organisations. These could be seen as pillars around which a whole generation of people working in voluntary organisation has evolved in India.

## RELATIONS

### Relations with State

Any discussion of relations between NGOs and the State (18) in a country like India needs to be based on the thorough understanding of the nature of voluntary organisations on the one hand, and the character of the State, on the other. In the previous sections, we have described the history of evolution of voluntary organisations in different phases as well as attempted a classification and typology of the contemporary scenario of voluntary organisations in India. In this section, we begin by examining various aspects of the State, particularly in a parliamentary democracy form - a form of governance that has been enshrined in the Indian Constitution and practiced since independence in 1947. The following description of the nature of such relations is not based on pure types because none exist in reality. The vast diversity of voluntary organisations and the complexity of the character of the State in a country of the size of India with local, regional and national dimensions makes it difficult to propound a specific set of relationships; yet the following is an attempt to highlight the dimensions of such a relationship and the nature that they acquire in the contemporary context.

#### 1. State as Regulator

One of the functions of the government in a modern society is to regulate the social, political and economic space. The State enacts a variety of regulatory mechanisms through its organs and agencies as well as through laws and legislations.

Three types of legislations directly affect voluntary organisations in India today. The first set relates to **laws of registration or incorporation** (19). The most common form of registration is a Society or a Trust. Both legislations were first set-up during the colonial British Rule. The Society Act has been subsequently modified and amended by several state governments in different parts of the country. In some fundamental ways, incorporation or registration provides a legal identity to voluntary organisations and, therefore, limits the liability of its promoters and founders. But it also means 'playing by the rules the game' as established by the State. Therefore, each successive amendment to the Society Registration Act in different states of the country has been an attempt to further tighten the 'noose around the neck' of voluntary organisations by giving unilateral and inordinate powers to the agents of the State to intervene, regulate and check the fates of voluntary organisations registered under the Society Registration Act of those states.

The second set of legislations that affect voluntary organisations are those related to **finance** (20). Two specific laws become relevant here. One is the Income Tax Act of 1961 which has always treated the work of voluntary organisations at par with that of a business trust, charitable hospitals, dispensaries, educational institutions, etc. So in the eyes of the Income Tax Act, all such organisations, including the ones which are the focus of this study, are treated similarly. In fact, the Income Tax Act gives special concessions to boarding schools, public schools, hospitals and dispensaries, but not to those voluntary organisations which are engaged in non-formal adult education, on the one hand, or primary health care, on the other. Thus every year, voluntary organisations must justify their non-profit status in the eyes of the Income Tax Department. Over the years, various amendments to the Income Tax Act have been made with a view to further tighten the control over voluntary organisations, and to create provisions by which the economic viability or autonomy of voluntary organisations is undermined. For example, the current provisions of Income Tax Act make it impossible for voluntary organisations to carry out any activity to raise resources for its own because surplus generated through those activities would be liable to tax.

The second legislation related to finance is the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, which was enacted during Emergency in 1976 and created to regulate the flow of foreign grants and contributions to all kinds of voluntary organisations in the country. That Act has been located in the Ministry of Internal Security and Home Affairs and those responsible for the implementation of that Act treat it as a problem of law-and-order, and not a problem of developmental social change.

### **FOREIGN CONTRIBUTION REGULATION ACT - 1976**

During the summer of 1976 in the height of emergency, the Government of India passed a legislation to regulate the flow of foreign contributions to voluntary development organizations in India. It entrusted the responsibility of implementation of the Act to Ministry of Home Affairs, subsequently named as Ministry of Internal Security in 1985. The Act initially provided for provisions for voluntary organizations receiving foreign contributions to report on a six monthly basis the grants received, the sources, amount and purpose.

In a dramatic amendment to this Act through an ordinance first in late 1984 and subsequently enactment of a legislation in January 1985, the Government of India further restricted the receipt and utilisation of foreign contribution by voluntary development organizations. The amended Act required old organizations to seek a registration with the Ministry of Internal Security and to provide statements of receipt, utilisation with audited statement of account. The practice over the

years became such that the Ministry of Internal Security refused to grant fresh registrations to voluntary organizations and even made it tighter for them to receive prior permission for receiving contribution. Also, the provisions of cancellation of registration number and inquiry under the Act were used selectively by the Ministry of Internal Security to intimidate and obstruct the work of voluntary development organizations under such a nebulous basis as threat to national security or public interest. As of now, the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act and concerned Ministry implementing the same have become objects of fear for a vast majority of voluntary organizations in the country.

The Act has been amended since then with a view to further tighten it as an attempt to limit the space and narrow the work of voluntary organisations. In an over all sense, over the last 20 years, the State has been tightening its role as a regulator and using it more often than not for limiting the space, work and the activities of those types of voluntary organisations which go beyond mere provision of help and charity and welfare of the poor.

## 2. State as Funder

Historically, a very unique role the State has played in India is that of Funder of voluntary organisations. Right after Independence, the then Congress Government began to utilise its access to vast resources to provide land, facilities, infrastructure and funds to a large number of Gandhian social work and constructive work organisations to continue their work as voluntary organisations. In fact, several institutions have been set up by the government over the last 45 years to find ways to promote funding of voluntary organisations. One of the early ones to be set up was **Khadi and Village Industries Corporation (KVIC)** - a unique institution set up to finance activities of those organisations engaged in promoting Khadi and Village Industries for the economic upliftment of the poor, as well as provide channels of marketing outlets to their productions. **Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB)**, and its counterparts in different states of the country, is another unique institution set up in late 50's to provide assistance to those organisations engaged in social welfare, particularly the welfare of the poor, the destitute, the weak, with a focus on women. Subsequently, a large number of departments and Ministries of the national and state governments began to evolve schemes for funding voluntary organisations. The most common ones have been in adult education, literacy, health care and in recent years in environment and social forestry. The National Wasteland Development Board is a unique mechanism set up to support, among others, voluntary organisations in their effort to 'green the wastelands' of India. More than three decades ago, an institution called **PADI (Peoples' Action Development India)** was set up with a view to channelise resources from outside the country to rural development organisations; but in its original form it was not so active and effective. In 1986,

**Council for Advancement of Peoples' Action & Rural Technology (CAPART)** was set up as an autonomous institution (incidentally registered under the Society Act) to finance voluntary organisations under various schemes and programmes. It is also interesting to note that CAPART has been able to evolve schemes like organisation of the poor beneficiaries, which provides the funds to voluntary organisations to organise the poor and to conscientise them.

### CAPART CASE

Council for Advancement of Peoples' Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) was set up in 1986 by amalgamating two previously existing organizations. These were PADI (Peoples' Action Development India) and CART (Council for Advancement of Rural Technology). The former was set up to channelise funds received from foreign agencies (mainly bilateral) to the work of voluntary organizations. The latter was set up to promote rural technology by providing research grants and development assistance to Universities, Research and Training Institutes, Voluntary Organizations, etc. The combination of the two was intended to result in massive additional grants to voluntary organizations, then promised to the tune of hundred crores a year. CAPART now operates several pre-designed programmes. Some of these are programmes being implemented by the government on its own and a component of that has been made available to voluntary organisations. These include the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDSP), RLEGP, Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme and Construction of Housing for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. It also operates a few new programmes called Organisation of Beneficiaries and the Social Animator Training scheme which is intended to raise awareness of the poor to take responsibility for their own development. There is a separate scheme for rural technology and another one for People's Action. In recent years, CAPART has been approving nearly 1000 projects every year with a total sanctioned amount in the range of Rs. 25 crores.

The experience of voluntary organizations working with CAPART has increasingly made them realise that this is another Government Department, and bureaucracy with all the implications of personal connections, red-tapeism and corruption as well.

Over the years, many voluntary organisations have utilised government funds and many continue to do so. A large number of them have totally depended on grants from the State. In many ways, the effect of all these on the work of voluntary organisations has been guided by the nature of the relationship between voluntary organisations and the state as a funder (one of a recipient to the

donor). Clearly in such a relationship, the recipient has less power, control and autonomy with respect to the donor. Many consequences flow from this relationship.

Firstly, most funding from the State is available for specific schemes and programmes, largely conceptualized and designed by the State itself. Voluntary agencies have to fit their proposals into those schemes and programmes if they want those resources. Thus, voluntary agencies, over a period of time, become mere implementors of the ideas, concepts and programmes created by the State. This has a subsidiary effect because it defines a narrow space for voluntary organisations by providing funds for pre-designed schemes and programmes, mostly in the areas of welfare and development. Thus, the work of voluntary organisations as a legitimate part of society is narrowly confined and defined. Another consequence of this has been increasing dependence of certain organisations on funds from the state. As such state mechanisms and institutions become increasingly bureaucratized and corrupt, and those voluntary organisations dependent on the state funding have to face this increasing bureaucratization and corruption within such state institutions and mechanisms. As a dependent recipient from the state donor, such voluntary organisations also experience the tension of attempting to work with bureaucratic and corrupt institutions in order to continue to receive the grants from the State. Various attempts have been made to modify these schemes, euphemistically called "grant-in-aid" (21). The overall experience seems to indicate that availability of resources from the state for the work of voluntary organisations is unique and useful, on the one hand, but has been limiting, controlling and dependence-creating, on the other. No significant change has been made in this approach of funding; in fact, it has been used to support charity, welfare and narrow-developmental work of voluntary organisations and discourage empowerment and struggle oriented work. It has been used to support those who have not raised significant voices against the state or its agents and representatives. In situations where such voices have been raised and local or state level vested interests have been challenged, government funding has stopped in the middle - what can be called the crisis of the 'second instalment'. The second instalment or grant-in-aid to voluntary organisations is stalled because of its work. The overall impact of this has been a carrot-and-stick approach, where funds have been given to those who do not 'rock-the-boat' or are willing to fit their work and activities within the programmes and schemes of the State. Funds have been stopped for those who tried to challenge the State, its strategies or programmes, agents and representatives through their own work. It seems that increasing bureaucratization and control over mechanisms of funding has considerably undermined their autonomous functioning and, therefore, those voluntary organisations in a recipient-donor relationship with the State find themselves in an uneasy situation.

### 3. State as Development Actor

The third dimension of this relationship has to be understood in the context of the State as a significant and dominant actor in the development arena. As a socialist welfare State defined through the Constitution of India right from Independence, various government schemes, departments and agencies have been started with a view to promote development in the country. In virtually every aspect of development from health, education, drinking water, sanitation, agriculture, rural development, forestry environment, family planning, etc., the government's own departments, programmes and schemes are most dominant and active. Thereby the space for voluntary organisations in the development arena has been increasingly shrinking. A consequence of this has been the use of development models and frameworks promoted by the State which are implemented through its own programmes, departments and schemes. Over the years, the state has established hegemony over such models of development and such frameworks.

Therefore, the state prefers that all other actors in the arena of development accept its hegemony. The voluntary organisations engaged in help, charity, welfare and narrow developmental activities find no difficulty to continue to operate within the ambit of the State's hegemonic role. However, others who question the policies and programmes of the State, who create new solutions and innovations which challenge the models of the State, which examine the consequences of the State models of development on continuing poverty and marginalisation and use it to form public opinion, find that the State as the dominant development actor comes in conflict with them. In those situations of conflicts and confrontation, a variety of mechanisms are used by the State to sustain and perpetuate its hegemony over development models and frameworks. Use of regulatory mechanism is one such example but perhaps more crucial and powerful is the use of the funding mechanism. By limiting funds to its own programmes and schemes, by providing funds to certain types of voluntary organisations, by creating fund-related dependence on itself among large sections of voluntary organisations, the State maintains its hegemony in the arena of development. Repression, intimidation, harassment, rejection and delegitimisation of those who question this hegemony of the State as development actor is a natural consequence very commonly practiced in the contemporary context.

Another important consequence of this has been that the State has been trying to monopolise all resources to itself with a view to provide development services, programmes and interventions. All internal and external resources are monopolised and controlled by the state and its agencies to promote development. Thus all bilateral funds from countries of the North, all funds from multilateral institutions of the U.N system must be approved, controlled and regulated

and primarily used by the State and its agents in the promotion of development activities. In fact, there is a continuous effort within this framework to establish the supreme role of the State as a development actor and appropriate to itself all resources, internal as well as external. Several moves in recent years have been made by the State and its agents to even capture all external funds coming from non-government sources from the North. Under the guise of regulating their disbursal to "well-meaning" voluntary organisations in the country, the combination of the State as a funder and the State as a development actor has proved to be so powerful in the Indian context that many voluntary organisations find themselves de-limited, dependent and in-capacitated to challenge the frameworks and models of development promoted by the State and thereby the hegemony of the State continues.

### KUDAL COMMISSION

The Lok Sabha passed a resolution on August 28, 1981 requesting the then government to institute a commission of enquiry into the activities, sources and misuse of funds of Gandhi Peace Foundation, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, and All India Sarva Sewa Sangh. A Commission headed by Mr. Justice P.D. Kudal was accordingly set up on February 17, 1982 under the Commission of Enquiry Act 1952. Though the commission was required to complete its work within a period of six months, its life continued to be extended till 1987. Over these years, the commission inquired into a large number of voluntary organizations associated with those mentioned in the Enquiry Commission terms of reference. It examined huge amounts of documents, memoranda, etc. And on the basis of that, it began to provide several interim reports and a final report.

In its first interim report it identified cases against Gandhi Peace Foundation, Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and All India Sarva Sewa Sangh totalling to number 11. And these were then forwarded to Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) by the government and subsequently cleared by CBI as not demanding any *prima-facie* further investigation. The totality of the work of the Commission has been a political vendetta exercise resulting in continued harassment of these voluntary organizations as well as those associated with them, complete stoppage of their work, obstruction to their receipt and utilization of funds and periodic mischievous public reporting in the press to tarnish the image of these and other voluntary organizations in the country. Over these years, the then ruling political party utilized the Commission and its interim and final reports to score political points against members of opposite political camps

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identified with certain voluntary organizations. In the final report of the Kudal Commission prepared in June 1987 but tabled in Parliament only in August 1989, the Chairman of the Commission Justice P.D. Kudal made certain general observations far exceeding its terms of reference and making categorical statements damaging the reputation of voluntary organizations. It went on to recommend a vast array of regulatory and punitive measures to restrict, control and punish the organizations (and their office-bearers) of voluntary nature engaged in development activities in the country. This has been the single most important event which has generated suspicion and hostility among voluntary organizations towards the then and future governments in the country.

#### 4. State as Moderator of Power

In a way, State is a confluence of political forces operating in a society and it is in this role of the State that voluntary organisations are most confused and not so clear about the nature of the relationship between voluntary organisations and the state. It is clear that this relationship depends a great deal on the nature of voluntary organisations themselves. Those engaged in developmentalist, non-confrontational, charity, welfare programmes and activities do not get into major confrontation with the State as they operate within the space defined by the State. They are able to receive grants and funds from the State and continue to maintain a sub-servient relationship to the dominant and hegemonic position of the State. Those operating with alternative perspectives and visions, those engaged in empowerment and struggle of the poor at different levels, those with larger size and greater visibility and "clout" continue to find themselves in difficult situations with the State. They are either co-opted or harassed; they are occasionally rejected and de-legitimised but mostly repressed and intimidated. The State uses its funding arm as well as its regulatory arm to carry out and sustain its adversarial relationship with such voluntary organisations.

#### ALL INDIA TALIM GHAR CASE

All India Talim Ghar (AITG) was founded in the 1930's to promote literacy among the poor in and around the city of Lucknow in U.P. The founder Mr. Heyatullah Ansari was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and took upon himself the responsibility to eradicate illiteracy, by organising literacy classes for the poor. Literacy classes were organised for prisoners, for villagers, particularly Scheduled Caste and for those living on the streets and in the temples and mosques. Through this experience, a new methodology of literacy teaching was evolved and significant production of learning materials and primers also took place. The work of Talim Ghar on literacy focused on Hindi and Urdu primers.

After independence, Talim Ghar took up the challenge of promoting Urdu and advocated its cause as a secular language with the government. Thus, the focus of work of Talim Ghar shifted, and only subsequently in 1972, the first grant from the government for its literacy centres was received.

As with others, the experience of government grants continued to cause irritations to the work of Talim Ghar and it remained so till 1978. No further grants from the government were received till 1986 when Talim Ghar shifted to Delhi and started adult education centres once again with the help of government grants. However, despite paucity of funds, the work of Talim Ghar in adult education continued in several districts of Uttar Pradesh and its primer got recognition by several universities and adult education centres. On the other hand, the government continued to ignore the importance of its work.

The experience of Talim Ghar indicates the struggle of a voluntary organisation in trying to pursue its own approach in promotion of literacy. It also indicates that as the life of a single individual provides for the sustenance of the organisation, then the organisation gets dependent on the approaches, experiences and involvements of that individual. In its contemporary form, All India Talim Ghar is much better organised as an institution to carry on the task of adult education among the urban and rural poor.

The second aspect of this relationship is that, by and large, the adversarial character of such relationship has remained stable over a period of history and types of voluntary organisations; though there are variations and these variations depend on persons involved and the leadership of the institutions. In certain configuration of persons sitting in certain positions of bureaucracy and ministry, the adversarial character of relationship gets underplayed and a collaborationist perspective emerges. But on the whole, beneath the veneer of collaboration lies the fundamental difference in perspectives and approach as well as origin.

### CROSS CASE

Comprehensive Rural Operation Service Society (CROSS) was set up in 1974 in Andhra Pradesh, with its office in Hyderabad, to work among the rural poor in the Telangana region. Using Freire's approach to conscientisation and adult education, village level Sanghams were built to liberate the people from 'a culture of silence' and to enhance their capacities to struggle for their own rights. The initial work of CROSS resulted in massive successes with the poor gaining rights over land, acquiring minimum wage and able to implement various schemes of

livelihood. This experience of CROSS became a model for several other organisations in the south and the Sangham model with a focus on geopolitical consolidation became the basis of the work of many other voluntary organisations in that region during the early and mid 80's.

After a period of organising the people, CROSS engaged in various developmental inputs in the areas of health, economic activities, forestry, etc. However, rapid growth of CROSS in the early 80's with the expansion to new areas resulted in internal strains in the organisation. Availability of funds, on the one hand, and the speed of expansion, on the other, did not provide for the opportunity of building and educating the Sangham, its leadership and the cadres as was available in the late 70's. Subsequently CROSS began to experience serious conflicts between its various regions and its leadership had to contend with these in a creative and responsive manner. CROSS also began to face problems with the government as its FCRA registration was cancelled in mid 80's and the consequence of that was a squeeze on its funds. CROSS's dependence on external funds had become so high that it was unable to sustain its work, its programme and its people. Over the years it resulted in disillusionment, frustration, anger and apathy among the staff while CROSS was trying to fight its case with the government which it ultimately won. Political interference and bureaucratic revenge were the main reasons for cancellation of the registration number of CROSS. It is a classic example of how government regulation and control can destroy a voluntary organisation in a short period of time.

Another implication for the nature of this relationship is that most voluntary organisations have remained entangled and concerned about the first three roles of the State in their relationship. They have been busy fighting regulations or utilising funds or questioning developmental models and frameworks. But by and large, voluntary organisations have ignored the fourth and perhaps the most crucial dimension of the state as a moderator of political power. It is here that voluntary organisations understand the least and it is here that their role has been most unclear and confusing. It is in this sense also that their relations with political parties have been either ignored or white-washed; and it is in this sense that the entire question of the relationship with political parties remains an ambiguous area in the study of voluntary organisations in India today.

### **Relations With Political Parties**

The contemporary scenario in India is such that most voluntary organisations have either no or an adversarial relationship with most political parties. For a large majority of voluntary organisations, political parties are not even worth relating to and for some

others they are a source of harassment, intimidation or discomfort. It is useful, therefore, to understand how such relations have come about historically in India.

It appears as if the affairs of the State have been captured by political parties, while the affairs of development have been delegated to voluntary organisations. Before Independence, Gandhi's concept of political action for the struggle for liberation of India was linked to his concept of social action for constructive work. Thus voluntary organisations were part of a larger political struggle and the link between political action and social action was integral, close and continuous.

This distinction seems to have widened since Independence and several tendencies might have contributed to this. The **first** trend was that immediately after Independence, Congress as a ruling political party continued to maintain close personal relationship with many Gandhians throughout the country who dedicated themselves to voluntary action. Thus the relationship between voluntary organisations of post-independence India and the Congress political party leadership were relations of an interpersonal nature of comrades who struggled together before independence, and who had now chosen two different routes - one in the government and another in voluntary organisations.

The **second** trend that seems to have contributed to this was the character of the political parties getting linked to formal political process of elections and representation. Parties began to be mostly worried about vote banks, elections, capturing legislatures and parliament and remaining in power to rule a state or the country. This brought in certain tendencies within the parties which led them further aside from debate on developmental concerns and issues.

In the 50's and 60's, political parties were actively involved in debating, discussing and formulating policies on issues of development, services, improvements in rural areas, local development etc. As the critique of the dominant development model began to emerge in late 60's, voluntary organisations began to be more interested in promoting new approaches and models of development at the local levels and began to distance themselves from the formal political process and, therefore, from parties, their machineries and leadership. The experience of the Janata Government experiment at the national level in late 70's further strengthened the trend within voluntary organisations of keeping distance from the parties and trying to carry forward their own work without bothering about formal political process and the parties. This tendency got reinforced through the emerging conceptualizations of non-party political formations which began to get articulated in late 70's and early 80's, and thus an alternative to parties as instruments of transforming society began to be conceptualised.

However, it is important to also look at the kind of reactions from and relationship that parties began to experience with voluntary organisations. Trends in different parts of the country indicate the following: **First**, political parties based on clearly articulated

ideology and having a cadre base tend to limit more sharply the political space for voluntary organisations. As a result, they tend to oppose voluntary organisations whom they perceive as threats to this limited political space. This has been the experience of organisations where Marxists have been ruling, like in West Bengal and Kerala. In recent years, it has also been the experience of voluntary organisations in those states where BJP (and RSS) has been in political power.

The **second** trend that has emerged from this experience is that the ruling party (or parties in power) at state or national level finds itself in a situation of discomfort when certain roles and functions are played by certain voluntary organisations. The most significant discomfort emerges when critique of development models, frameworks and policies of the government is articulated by certain voluntary organisations. This can be best visualized in the recent critique of large dams as a part of the policy framework and the discomfort that the successive ruling parties at the national level have been experiencing (the Congress, Janata and Janata Dal (S)).

The **third** trend that has been visible is that local political leadership is most affected by the actions of voluntary organisations and, therefore, reacts more directly and visibly, while the state or national level leadership appears to be more accommodative to the positions of voluntary organisations. This is so because political parties must work at the local level, build their own space and create mechanisms to become representatives of the people. Any challenge to that mechanism of representation or any threat to the hegemony of a party and its leader through the work of voluntary organisations, therefore, is bound to be resisted, questioned and challenged. In some situations, the response of political parties has been fairly vehement as can be seen from the experience of Kashtkari Sanghatana.

### KASHTKARI SANGHATANA CASE

Kashtkari Sanghatana emerged in the mid 70's as a movement of tribals in Thane District of Maharashtra. It began to take up issues of the rights of the tribals, wages to the tribals, access to land and forest to the tribals. And over a period of time it evolved into a significant movement in that region. By early 80's, the Sanghatana began to experience major conflicts with the Communist Party (Marxists) and its Cadre. The Cadre of the Sanghatana began to assert their autonomous movement and pursuit of the rights of the tribals. This lead to conflicts around the issues of political space and power in that area which had a long-standing communist movement. In the first half of 80's, major conflicts, tensions, fights and struggles between the cadres of the Sanghatana and those of the CPM broke out.

On one hand, this highlighted the question of the relations of such voluntary organisations with political parties, and, on the other, di-

verted the attention of the Sanghatana to struggles with cadres of CPM, instead of pursuing the issues and rights of the tribals. However, Sanghatana has emerged as a major voice and organisation of the tribals struggling for their rights over land, forest, water, livelihood in recent years. Those who were the inspiration behind the formation of the Sanghatana have begun to evolve some developmental initiatives to support and strengthen the membership and the leadership of the Sanghatana. These interventions are in areas of education and health. Alternative forms and ways of approaching the question of education and health for the tribals are being experimented with. At the same time engaging in these developmental initiatives has raised the question of funds. The Sanghatana is trying to evolve some self-reliant ways of financing its own developmental initiatives, though it is finding it to be a difficult exercise.

In the contemporary sense, therefore, there is a significant absence of linkages and communication across voluntary organisations and political parties. Both view each other with suspicion and hostility; voluntary organisations tend to view parties and their leaders as self-serving, self-seeking, corrupt, power-hungry, not-caring, not-interested-in-the-poor types. On the other hand, political parties view voluntary agencies and their leaders as 'misguided agents of foreign imperialism', flush-with funds and largely marginal to the mainstream issues and concerns in the society. It is, therefore, important that a comprehensive analysis of socio-political context of the Indian society is carried out by both, with a view to understand the role that both may play towards a rather broad, though commonly agreed, aim of social transformation. Such an analysis may help create possibilities for informed mutual understanding and attempts to work together on issues of common concern. This may also open up avenues for mutual influence and exchange of ideas and experiences across boundaries.

### **Relations with Trade Unions**

Significant in this debate on the relations between voluntary organisations and other sectors of society is the question of relationship with trade unions. Trade unions have a very long tradition and history of militant struggle and advancing the cause of the poor workers in India. Their track record is now nearly 100 years old and significant rights for workers, their service conditions, terms of employment and the rights of Trade Union association have been won through the long history of struggles of the workers and their organisations in India. It is, therefore, surprising that in a country like India relations between voluntary organisations and trade unions are almost negligible, by and large, and occasionally adversarial. It is, therefore important to understand the history of this relationship and the underlying causes why such a gap and distance exists between voluntary organisations and trade unions.

The first significant reason is that most trade unions are an extension of political parties in India. Most of them are affiliated to political parties and most political parties have their own trade union wings. As a result, the nature of relationship between voluntary organisations and the political parties gets extended to and manifested in their relationship with trade unions. The second trend has been that most trade unions in post-independence India have focused their energies and attention in organising the urban industrial workforce and focused largely on their economic and employment related aspects. On the other hand, almost by contrast, most voluntary organisations have focused on rural, tribal areas and on issues related to health, education, rural development, agriculture, etc. It is almost a dichotomy - trade unions representing the interests of urban-industrial base, while voluntary organisations working with small, marginal farmers, landless labours and others. This has been the dominant perception on both sides and a cause for the growing distance.

In recent years, there have been some attempts at bridging this gap and some linkages have been established across the two communities. Some initiatives have come from independent trade unions as well, and some from those who have been also engaged in organising the rural poor and the informal sector. Therefore, the current scenario of apathy, hostility and mistrust between trade unions and their leadership, on one hand, and voluntary organisations and their leadership, on the other, needs to be reviewed, examined and overcome. It is interesting to note that many voluntary organisations have been combining in their work with the communities the form of 'struggle' as well as trade unionism. The enclosed boxes on SEWA and VIDHAYAK SANSAD indicate how utilizing the trade union form of organizing has significantly advanced their work and brought important results for the communities they have been working with. Therefore, it appears that trade unions may have a great deal to contribute to the learning and work of voluntary organisation as well as vice versa and that at fundamental levels, both sets of organisations are engaged in a broadly common endeavour of social transformation.

### COMBINING FORMS OF REGISTRATION

One concern among many voluntary organizations is to select an appropriate form of registration to give legal shape to their ongoing work.

Some of them are engaged in struggle; some of them are engaged in promoting development. One form of registration may be appropriate to one, and another to the other. There are two very interesting examples which creatively combine various forms of registration to provide a basis for continuing their work. One is the experience of the Vidhayak Sansad and Shramjivi Sanghatana. In Thane district of Maharashtra, Vidhayak Sansad started to work in the Dahisar village with the poor through a medical centre and 'balwadi' (creche) in 1980. As

the work in the villages began to spread through the work of balwadi, the founders began to realise that certain adults belonging to tribal communities and children from those families were not getting involved in village meetings or programmes. This lead them to realise and recognize the problem of bondage in those villages. Soon they initiated a struggle, putting pressure on the government and local officials which resulted in the release of bonded labour and paying back of past wages. But as a registered Public Trust, Vidhyak Sansad did not represent the people and their struggle. So in 1982, a peoples' organisation called Shramjivi Sanghatana was formed to provide a mechanism for the struggle of the tribals in that area. Since then both Vidhyak Sansad and Shramjivi Sanghatana have worked in tandem, one focusing on developmental initiatives and other on the struggle and organisation of the people. Maintaining close links and yet independent identities, these two have evolved into an interesting model for several other such initiatives to follow in different parts of the country.

The second example is that of SEWA - the Self Employed Womens' Association in Ahmedabad. SEWA started as part of a larger trade union - Textile Labour Association - in Ahmedabad representing the textile workers in that city. Its initial work was organizing women workers and initiating struggle for improving their situation. Due to historical reasons, when SEWA broke away from its parent trade union, it constituted itself into a trade union of the self-employed women workers in the city of Ahmedabad. After an initial period of work in organizing and struggling for the cause of the women workers, SEWA began to recognise the importance of initiating some developmental efforts, like co-operatives for credit, production and marketing activities in several areas of women's employment. So SEWA gradually evolved other forms of registration like Co-operatives and Trust to promote its developmental and economic activities intended to support the overall framework of struggle by SEWA trade union. In this case, unlike in the previous one, the name of all these various institutions remained the same.



## FEDERATING

The history of associations across voluntary organisations in India is as old as the history of the movement of voluntary organisations themselves. Several associational ventures have been in existence since before independence. The Association of Sarva Sewa Farm, Bharat Sevak Samaj, the Indian Cooperative Union are some examples of long standing associations. Indian Adult Education Association, All India Women's Conference and Young Men Christian Association, Young Women Christian Association are further examples of National and International Federations of local level voluntary organisations in the country. Some of these came about at the initiatives from the base; some were set up through National and International initiatives of concerned voluntary organisations. Some others like the Khadi and Village Industries institutions were set-up at the initiative of the government. By and large, there has been an ongoing trend towards attempts at federating, at coming together, and finding a common ground in order to accomplish some common objectives.

Yet, the history of federations and associations of voluntary organisations in India has not been a very satisfying one. More associations have not functioned than those which have formally existed. Many more have split-up, crumbled, stagnated or decayed than those which have survived, grown and continued. In reassessing their contributions, it is hard to provide a final, definitive judgment, but it seems that many such associations have not been able to make the kind of impact of which they had a potential. In this section, we examine, in some detail, aspects about federating voluntary organisations in India.

### Rationale

The first question that needs to be posed is the **rationale for federating**. Why do voluntary organisations want to associate with each other? Historically, there seem to be three dominant reasons. The first reason is to overcome isolation. By definition, most voluntary organisations work in small, limited, many a times remote, rural areas. They mostly get busy with their work at the grassroots level and remain focused within that socio-geographical context. After a period of time they begin to feel isolated. As social change interventions, they find themselves isolated and alone in the larger socio-political context. It is at that stage that a desire to relate with similar social change institutions working in the nearby areas begins to emerge. So, many a times, associating and federating and coming together comes with this desire to have communication, to establish links with like-minded and similar others and to find a way of relating, exchanging and sharing. Many such attempts have been effectively

and successfully made to overcome socio-geographical isolation by relating to similar voluntary organisations at the block level, at the district level or even at the state level. Regional variations in federating have obviously existed.

The second rationale for associating comes on the **basis of the desire to influence macro level**. After some years of work at the micro level, in a limited set of villages and slums, many voluntary agencies begin to realise that they can not move beyond their local and immediate impact unless they find ways to influence macro levels. Unless they are able to find a strategy to influence the district administration, the state government, the national and perhaps even the international decision-makers, the scope of their work, the depth of their impact will remain constrained and limited. As this realization begins to develop, attempts at association or federation start to overcome the limitation of working at micro level. Association through a process of federating is seen as a way of developing collective strength among voluntary organisations to be able to influence macro issues, policies and frameworks. Historically, several attempts have been made with this purpose in mind, though many of them have been focusing on a specific issue or working on informal processes of federating.

The third dominant reason for coming together is **protection** -protection of space, protection of identity, protection of legitimacy and credibility. In situations where the State or other vested-interests in society have posed a threat or made an attack on voluntary organisations, there has been simultaneous response to come together, to associate, to federate in order to protect the space, protect the role, protect the legitimacy and credibility of the voluntary organisations in the face of such attacks. In situations of tightening of regulatory procedures, harassment or intimidation by government agencies and law-and-order machinery or dominant control by donors, many attempts of coming together and federating have been made in the country.

### **Issues**

In the light of these reasons for federating and associating, there are certain issues which emerge that also provide further understanding of this process in India. The first issue is the nature of the federating process. Some federating processes have been general - all voluntary organisations coming together on a common platform to take on some common issues. One of the first such initiatives was in 1958 in the form of setting-up of AVARD (Association of Voluntary Agencies in Rural Development).

#### **AVARD CASE**

Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD) was set-up following a conference organised on the role of voluntary organisations in the field of rural development in 1956. The conference was organised in the face of continued harassment and neglect by the officials of the community development programme and the statement

of its chief administrative officer decrying the role of voluntary organisations in the promotion of community development immediately after independence. Many long-standing organisations took part in that seminar where a decision was taken to create a national platform of voluntary organisations engaged in rural development, so as to work together on these issues and solve their problems jointly and collectively. With the leadership of Kamla Devi Chatopadhyaya in the initial years and Jaya Prakash Narain in its formative years, AVARD acquired a very dynamic and visible presence in the country and became a champion for the cause of voluntary organisations.

However, it got involved in field-based implementation of certain programmes and projects in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the early years which took it away from its task of association and federating. It also got busy with the role of servicing voluntary organisations by helping them prepare project proposals and acquire funding. These roles of training, technical support, monitoring, evaluation, resource mobilization, etc., also took it away from its original purpose of federating and association. Subsequently, AVARD came under attack and scrutiny with the formation of the Kudal Commission in 1982. That experience over the next five years further reduced the work and effectiveness of AVARD as a federation or association of like-minded voluntary organisations of the country.

AVARD's experience of setting up state chapters or federations of voluntary organisations has not been a very positive one. It found that serious leadership problems began to emerge in creating state level federations and chapters of voluntary organisations. Leadership struggles for the position of president and secretary occurred in the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, etc. Two federations had to be set-up in Bihar, one for North and one for the South. The person made the key leader of AVARD's Madhya Pradesh chapter was unable to exercise the leadership. Karnataka evolved two federations around two strong voluntary organisation leaders. A similar trend occurred in Andhra Pradesh. This experience further lead to the weakening of the associational, federating character of the organisation as the leadership struggle and fight within the organisation made it internally weak and externally incredible to pursue its federating role. It is only in the last three years that once again AVARD is trying to re-dedicate itself to its original mandate of association and federating activities without getting involved in either implementing programmes at the grass-roots level or providing technical services and support to others.

In recent years, however, there have been many other issue-based efforts at federating. These efforts have taken the form of not federations or associations but more as informal networks of voluntary organisations and others on the issues of dam, drug policy, women's rights, legal-aid, etc., are the most visible and contemporarily most illustrative of this form of federating. Yet, issue-based federating or associations have also taken on a more organised form. National Leprosy Organisations' Associations and the Voluntary Health Association of India with its state level branches and chapters are examples of national level issue-based associations of voluntary organisations working on that particular issue. The most significant ones of this type have been in areas of health, child welfare and on the theme of women. The contribution of issue-based networks or associations has been to strengthen the understanding of voluntary organisations on that specific issue and to focus attention among the public and within the decision-making structures on that specific issue.

## **Networking**

In the development dialogue of the last decade the word 'network' has certainly acquired prominence. Derived from its original use in electronics, 'networks' have become important forms of dealing with complex developmental issues in our society. The reason networks have become so popular as a form of organizing to respond to issues is because of the institutional framework of many organizations. The traditional form of organizing creates mechanisms which do not provide space for individuals to interact freely with other organised entities nor allow free flow of ideas. Thus, members of an organisation find it difficult to collaborate on an issue-specific, time-bound manner with others working in diverse other organizational forms. It is here that as a mechanism of exchanging information, building collaboration and taking some concrete common steps around a specific issue, networks have become a very popular way of organizing in the contemporary style of working of voluntary organizations.

Networks provide for the opportunity of interaction, exchange of information, dialogue, joint action among those who may be situated in different organizational settings -NGOs, government, academic institutions, trade unions, political parties, womens' organizations, etc., etc. Networks also create the possibility of individuals and organizations working on a similar issue with somewhat different perspectives to come together, share their information, knowledge base, expertise, resources, capacities in order to work together on that specific issue. A large amount of work around the questions of environment, large dams, participatory research, campaign against Union Carbide following the Bhopal Gas disaster, etc., has been organised through networks.

The history of formal or informal issue-based or general networks, associations of federations in India has been rather disappointing. Their contribution has been limited and many federations, associations or networks have not been able to fulfill their

potential as associations and federations of voluntary organisations. Many reasons can be traced for this, some of which appear more significant than others. The **first** reason is the conceptual one, related to the desirability of a single, multipurpose federation over many-issue based associations. Given the wide range of issues on which voluntary organisations work, given the diversity of their inspirations, the history and the leadership, is it conceivable, or even desirable, that a single federation or association should knit them all together ? If diversity of approaches, inspirations, perspectives and issues is the essence of voluntary organisations in the country, then uniformity in federations or associations may bring in weakness as opposed to collective strength. This is the question that needs to be examined in its entirety.

The **second** issue relates to the question of the very essence of voluntary organisations as autonomous, independent institutions. As autonomous institutions, they believe in different approaches, philosophies, perspectives and styles. Therefore, it is difficult for several autonomous institutions to come together under a common formal framework of a federation. The federating structure is unable to provide a vision or a thrust which can bring them together since all do not share a common vision , common inspiration, common approach . Any attempt to provide a unifying vision or thrust is likely to be seen as a violation of their autonomy and independence. As a result, many such federations have and are becoming membership associations of a social club type of arrangement.

Another reason which has been the experience of some of the long-standing federations like AVARD is the issue of inability of leadership to work together, in a given region or at the national level. The struggle for leadership in the history of AVARD has been a phenomenal one in different states. Leaders of voluntary organisations are social entrepreneurs. They are visionaries, and jealously autonomous and independent individuals. That characteristic in itself makes it difficult for such leaders to come together and work together and to accept a common leadership. The history and the tradition of leadership in India and perhaps the culture of the country indicates that such collective, shared leadership is not a very common or easy thing to bring about in practice. As a result, leadership struggles inevitably make such federating associational attempts a frustrating and impossible exercise.

Despite these tensions and difficulties, many associations and federations have come up in different parts of the country. There are some significant regional variations. In some regions, associations and networks came about in the 70's. In a state like Tamil Nadu, several such federations were active by late 70's, though it did bring about disruptive and separatist tendencies among those voluntary organisations. In some other states, like Uttar Pradesh, no such federation has been effective at the state level so far. Yet in a large state like Madhya Pradesh, contemporary Madhya Pradesh Federation of Voluntary Organisations has been able to bring together all spectrum of voluntary agencies on a common platform.

It seems that the history of the evolution of the voluntary organisations in each of the regions of the country and, in particular the history of the leadership of voluntary organisations in those regions, has a substantial impact on the emergence, or otherwise, of a cohesive regional association or federation. In some states attempts at federating have yielded more frustration, division and separation than coming together. Orissa is one such example. Another one is Andhra Pradesh.

Recent trends, however, seem to indicate that a new generation of leadership of voluntary organisations, a younger set of people in their mid 30s or 40s are beginning to work towards establishing horizontal relationship among their friends, comrades and colleagues across voluntary organisations in different regions. And perhaps it is this process which will help build a wider base for such associations or federations to emerge. Clearly the task of knitting together a wide range of experiences, ideas, perspectives and strands of voluntary organisations in a country like India is necessary and a phenomenal one. Unless mechanisms to bring voluntary organisations and leadership together around issues of common national concern are evolved and sustained, it is unlikely that they will have the kind of **collective impact** that their numbers, strengths and potential may create.

## ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

It is not very common to have a discussion on aspects related to the organisation of voluntary development organisations in India. Historically, the **concept of organisation**, its issues and dynamics have been neglected in this sector in India. Very little attention has been paid to different dimensions or aspects of organisation (22). In fact, it has been treated as a necessary evil by the founder(s) of such voluntary organisations. The focus of this study includes looking at issues related to the organisational aspects of voluntary development organisations in India, based on the recognition that this sector of organisations has been experiencing certain critical issues in this regard. The findings in this section indicate the urgency with which these critical issues need to be dealt with, jointly and separately by such organisations.

Any debate or discussion among members of the voluntary organisations in India on this question of why you create organisations or what is the **rationale** behind doing so, leads to confused and partial answers. Largely because very few of them, have ever thought about this deliberately. By and large, organisations get created because that seems like the most natural or common place way of functioning. In the same way, as a people's group gets organised and is provided a legal identity in the form of registration without much thought in many places. It seems that two main reasons for creating voluntary organisations, as opposed to taking individualized voluntary initiatives, are rooted in two different priorities. One main reason relates to providing a collective mechanism to pursue the commitment to work with the various dimensions of social change in the society. It is when individual pursuit of such a commitment becomes difficult that a collective mechanism needs to be created. This mechanism becomes the organisation. The other route for creating an organisation is based on the requirements of projects. Increasingly project funds are available only to organised initiatives, and not to individuals. Many voluntary development organisations have come about because of this requirement as well. Whatever may be the rationale, it has an impact on the manner in which this organisation gets formulated and then the manner in which it operates. Several issues emerge in this regard which are elaborated below:

### Forms of Registration

Once a Voluntary Development Organisation is created then the question of providing a legal identity to it acquires significance. Pressures to provide legal identity emanate from diverse sources - the most common in many cases is the requirement of

the outside environment to relate with a legal entity. This requirement is imposed by donors, by regulatory mechanisms of various types. The second pressure to provide a legal identity comes from the question of establishing an ongoing identity to the organisation, beyond the person of the founder(s). This pressure also helps to reduce the liability of the founder(s) as persons, but provides the framework for a legal entity which acquires a life of its own.

The contemporary choice for the form of registration for voluntary development organisation in India is rather limited. The most common place registration form is (various versions of) **Society Registration Act**. The mother act was created at the Central level in 1860 and after independence, several state governments have brought up their own legislations for Registration of Societies. **Trust** has also been another very common form of registration for such initiatives. Other forms include a **Trade Union**, a **Co-operative** and in rare occasions a **Partnership or a Company** (under section 25). The details about the forms of registration are not necessary here. What is important is to understand the implications of these various forms and their overall impact on the functioning of voluntary organisations. Providing a legal identity and ensuring registration of a voluntary organisation thus, makes it accountable to various organs of the State, restricting the autonomy of the voluntary organisations. This accountability entails periodic reporting requirements in the forms and manner prescribed by those organs and gives the rights to those organs to intervene in that voluntary organisation as they deem fit. Thus, acquiring a legal identity through a form of registration restricts the overall autonomy of a voluntary organisation.

Secondly, contemporary forms of registration have been created for purposes other than the ones they have been used for. Historically, Society Registration Act was created in 1860 to provide for registration of membership organisations like national association of doctors, nurses, teachers. It is today being used for operating voluntary organisations as a common form of registration. After independence, many state governments formulated their own legislations for registration of societies. Each of these further restrict the autonomy of voluntary organisations. But Society Registration Act continues to be the most popular form of registration of voluntary organisations in India. The next one which is equally common is the Trust Act. In the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, a separate Public Trust Act requires registration of all voluntary organisations in that form. Yet, the Trust Act was created to manage trust properties and not to operate voluntary development organisations. Another form of registration is a Trade union which is most effective in pursuit of the rights of people through struggle. Co-operative was conceptualized as a form of legislation for economic activity by the poor but successive governments for the last 40 years throughout the country have made Co-operatives a part of the department of the government itself. As a result, the procedure for getting co-operatives registered and the manner in which they are monitored, regulated and controlled by agents of the government makes it the most undesirable form of registration at the moment. Thus

voluntary organisations promoting income-generation programme find it difficult to create an appropriate form of registration. Companies Act under Section 25 does provide for registration to non-profit institutions but the reporting requirements under that Act are enormous (the Act was created for large industrial and commercial enterprises). Likewise partnership as a form of registration is most appropriately created for small shops and establishments to generate profit and is not so applicable with respect to the work of voluntary organisations.

Thus we find that none of the existing forms of registration are appropriate to the vast range of work that voluntary organisations do. As a result, voluntary organisations stretch the interpretation of existing forms to suit their specific requirements. A consequence of that is ongoing confrontation and misunderstanding between voluntary organisations, on one hand, and officials of the government responsible for the implementation of these forms of registration, on the other. There is a unique and urgent requirement of setting up a simple, easy to operate, alternative form of registration that incorporates the wide range of roles voluntary organisations play in India today.

Some other organisations have attempted to combine more than one form in order to truly represent the wide range of roles they play. Combining a form of trade union with trust society has been practiced in several cases. Yet, having more than one form of registration entails its own complications by requiring maintenance of records and reporting formats in more than one form. Therefore, the question of providing a legal identity to a voluntary organisation acquires significance both in the form it chooses as well as the implication of that form on the structure and functioning of such voluntary organisations.

### **Social Change Organisation**

As has been mentioned earlier, voluntary development organisations have been set up to pursue social commitment, to work in society to bring about certain changes. As a consequence, Voluntary Development Organisations in India can be called Social Change Organisations. Certain requirements of the social change organisation have not yet been elaborated in theory. Much of the theory of organisations is based on the experience of large industrial and commercial organisations, on one hand, and government organisations, on the other. It is only in recent years that some conceptualization on social change organisations has started taking place.

It has become clear that the dominant framework to understand social change organisations is to examine the vision with which such organisations get created and then to understand its specific mission. Clarification of the vision and mission of social change organisations is key to clarifying its structure and processes. The second dimension in understanding such an organisation is to examine the appropriateness of its strategy -with respect to the constituency with whom it works, and the nature of its relationship with those constituencies. The choice of its strategy, or a set

of strategies, determines the nature of the programmes and activities that such a voluntary organisation would undertake and the structure of voluntary organisations emerges on the basis of such programmes and activities.

In this broad framework, several issues of concern are emerging with respect to Voluntary Development Organisation in India. The first set of issues relate to the choice of the strategy itself. It has become increasingly clear that forces other than the requirements of the vision and mission sometimes tend to determine the strategy of a voluntary organisation. Some of these forces emanate from the donors and funders. In some other situations, choice of programmes and activities is made first, and the strategy and the mission is elaborated subsequently. This again is because of the influence from the outside, largely from donors. In such situations, the nature of Voluntary Development Organisations becomes a programme-implementing organisation as opposed to a mission-pursuing institution.

The second implication of this has been in terms of issues related to core values of an organisation. All Social Change Organisations have certain core values which determine the manner in which it functions and the way it structures itself. However, the most difficult aspect in this regard in Voluntary Development Organisations in India has been continued debate and confusion regarding the necessity, or otherwise, of its structure. Since many people found voluntary organisations as a reaction against government institutions which are highly structured and bureaucratized, there is an inherent and distinct dislike for anything which has a 'structure'. Yet, growing size and requirements of the task demand a minimum appropriate structure and in the absence of evolution of such an appropriate structure, the overall effectiveness of voluntary organisations gets compromised.

### **GRAM VIKAS CASE**

Gram Vikas was set up in Ganjam District of Orissa in the second half of 70's by a small group of committed young persons who had earlier worked in the cyclone-relief programme in central Orissa. In the Kerandimal region of Ganjam district, they began to work with tribals and recognise the exploitation experienced by tribals. Initial conscientisation of tribals resulted in formation of an organised effort by the tribals to regain their land, trees, cattle, utensils and equipment mortgaged to the local money-lenders and liquor-merchants. On the recovery of these assets, Gram Vikas initiated a programme of education, credit, and training to help the tribals earn livelihood from their assets. Gradually, the work of Gram Vikas expanded into integrated tribal development with programmes of health, education, training, leadership building, credit and economic activities.

In mid 80's, Gram Vikas began to implement Bio-gas programme as a

measure of reducing the dependence of the tribals on fuel-wood and creating an opportunity for re-cycling the cattle-waste. Gram Vikas gradually got involved in the implementation of the national programme of Bio-gas which in turn resulted in significant expansion of the organisation within 2-3 years.

From a small team of 5 persons in mid 70's, Gram Vikas today is a large organisation of about 800 full-time staff working in all the districts of Orissa. The growth in size, in activities, in geographical coverage and in the budget resulted in serious internal strains at Gram Vikas which its leadership has tried to deal with by creation of systems, procedures and other mechanisms. The challenge faced by Gram Vikas now is to strengthen its institutional base in a way that its programmes and activities can continue to be responsive to the needs of the tribals, on one hand, and carried out in the manner that engages the capacities and capabilities of the organisation, on the other.

### **Leadership**

The issue of leadership is central to the functioning of Voluntary Development Organisations in India today. This is so because of several reasons. As social change organisations, they are set up by a person, or a group of persons, with a definite vision, elaborating a specific mission. In some ways creating a social change organisation requires a social entrepreneur - a person imbued by a certain vision and having the capacity of an entrepreneur to translate that in the form of an organisation. Thus, from the very beginning, Voluntary Development Organisations become leader-centric. By and large, all such leaders are charismatic, visionary persons who bring energy and commitment into the organisation. They provide the motive force in early years of the organisation. They become a source of inspiration for the newer set of people joining the organisation. They are able to work with the people at the base and in other constituencies because of their sense of commitment and zeal.

However, such leader-centric Voluntary Development Organisations in India also face certain issues. The first issue relates to the tendency of such leadership to look at issues outside the organisation. As founder(s) of social change organisations, these leaders want to do what the organisation has been set up to do. They much rather work with the tribals, with women, with the poor themselves, in organising workshops and training programmes, carrying out economic activities, providing services, etc. That is what they want to do, that is what they are capable of doing, that is what they set up these organisation for. However, over a period of time, like all other organisations, social change organisations also require the leadership role inside the organisations. They require the attention and the energies of the leaders on issues affecting the organisation per se. This is something most founder leaders find ex-

tremely difficult to do. They would much rather look outside than look inside the organisation. And any attempt on their part to work with issues of concern inside the organisation are seen as diverting their energies from the task at hand. Such leaders are paying very little attention to building the organisation from inside.

The second issue facing these leaders is the absence of the capacity of new generation of people to provide leadership in the organisation. Such organisations become leader-dependent and find it difficult to create spaces and opportunities for new sets of people to exercise leadership inside and outside the organisation.

As a consequence of these, many Voluntary Development Organisations face serious problems of an organisational type. They face enormous conflicts inside the organisation among diverse sets of people; they variously experience tensions on questions of structure, roles and responsibilities and invariably find decentralisation of decision-making and attempts of delegation not being institutionalized. They find people leaving, organisations splitting, some having problems of maintaining a culture of the organisation. These trends inside the voluntary organisation indicate that the organisation's strengthening and building measures have not been paid attention to.

### ISI CASE

The issue of identity afflicts several voluntary organizations, particularly in periods of transition. One case in point is the Indian Social Institute. As a Jesuit institution, it began to get involved in promotion of serious academic research on problems of social development in the country in late 60's and early 70's. However, by late 70's, particularly after emergency, the leadership of the Institute began to give it a more pro-activist, pro-people orientation. Its research, studies and extension programmes began to respond to the requirements of the struggles of poor at the base and the work of voluntary organizations. Thus, it began to experience a tension between its earlier academic rigour and orientation to its now pro-social action position and support to local activists. This resulted in significant questions related to what is the identity of the Institute? It also resulted in tensions within the institution, among various categories of staff as they were not able to deal with the shifts in the orientation of the institute and not able to come to terms with questions of the new identity.

Similar concerns began to emerge in the wider environment where the earlier image of the Institute as a rigorous academic institution was no longer being supported by its pro-social action approach. Questions also began to emerge about its Christian identity. The view of leadership of the Institute was to seek spiritual inspiration as a basis for their commitment to social cause but not to translate it into the functioning

of the Institute. However, in the larger environment, including within the community of voluntary development organizations in the country, the Institute continued to be viewed as a Christian institution. On the other hand, within the tradition of Christian institutions, this Institute stood alone as it was directly, openly and frontally taking peoples' causes and concerns on its agenda something which was not common to other Christian institutions in the country. Thus, the issue of conflicting multiple identities, and changing identities affecting the organisation of a voluntary initiative, on the one hand, and its relations with the environment, on other, can be most interestingly seen in the experience of the Indian Social Institute in Delhi.

### **Professionalism**

A significant trend of the 80's in many voluntary development organisations in India has been increasing demands of professionalism of their work. This demand has come from several quarters. First of all, a stress on providing high quality and efficient work came from funders and donors. It was not possible any longer to just keep on working at the same pace, level and capacity as was possible earlier. The second pressure came from emerging new issues. Issues of environment, forestry, economic activity, appropriate technology, on one hand, documentation, training and research, on the other, began to demand use of people with certain professional capacities in these areas. A third pressure came as a new set of voluntary organisations began to emerge with professional leadership. Founders of such organisations were engineers, doctors, scientists, managers, accountants, foresters, veterenarians, agriculturists, etc.

This trend towards professionalism has led to some positive and some negative consequences for voluntary organisation. One of the positive consequences has been bringing in large number of young people trained in professional disciplines to work in pursuit of social commitment, in social change organisations. In the previous period, it was difficult for such persons to consider social change organisations as a possible area of their work.

But with the setting up of institutions like PRADAN whose members visited large number of campuses of professional education to educate the students about such social change organisations, a larger number of professionally trained persons began to make this choice. The second positive consequence was the use of appropriate knowledge, technology and capacities to address certain complicated problems of development faced by such voluntary organisations in the country. Classic examples are in respect of irrigation, health, education and income-generation.

The coming in of such highly trained young persons in Voluntary Development Organisation is also the cause for some tensions. The first one was the tension between the young professionals and the old activists. Unnecessary and confusing debate started emerging which put professionalism in opposition to activism and

voluntarism. It began to be said that those who are professionally trained in certain disciplines cannot become activists and those who are activists cannot acquire professional competence. The definition of professionalism became narrow and technomanagerial degrees and formal education got equated with professionalism. Commitment to work and a style of functioning with appropriate competencies did not get equated with professionalism. Thus, a vast number of voluntary organisations which have inducted technically and professionally qualified young persons continue to experience such tensions and conflicts. The second consequence has been bringing models, frameworks, technologies and techniques without rooting them in a local context. The knowledge base and experience of the poor communities with respect to dealing with various aspects of development got ignored and sidelined, as "imported" techniques, technologies, approaches and frameworks began to be implemented.

Yet, the overall impact of this trend has been favourable for the Voluntary Development Organisations. Primarily because it has been able to attract a new generation of formally educated people to work in social change organisations. It has also led to building up a wide range of capacities in such organisations to take on more challenging and diverse roles in the future.

### **Funding**

The nature of funding of Voluntary Development Organisations also significantly affects its overall organisation and functioning. Historically, Voluntary Development Organisations have acquired funding from diverse sources. For small, local, community-based voluntary organisations, local resources have been adequate. For larger initiatives, funds have come either from richer members of society or from religious institutions or from Trusts. There were the philanthropists - with their liberal endowments some of which were made with an eye to the tax benefits so accrued. However, the overall percentage of such contributions towards the funding of Voluntary Development Organisations in post-independence India has been rather limited. The two dominant sources of funding the work of Voluntary Development Organisations since independence have been either government funds or foreign funds. Both of these have their peculiar and separate logic and they need to be understood in that way.

By and large, funds from the government to the work of voluntary organisations have been coming right from independence. Central Social Welfare Board and Khadi and Village Industries Corporation are two early examples of funding the work of certain types of activities of Voluntary Development Organisations. Later, Ministries of Education and Health began to support the work of Voluntary Development Organisations. Subsequently, Ministries of Child & Women Welfare, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Science & Technology, Ministry of Rural Development, etc., also began to finance the work of voluntary organisations for specific schemes and programmes. In the mid

80's, additional institutions were created to support the work of voluntary organisations financially. CAPART (Council for Advancement of Peoples' Action and Rural Technology) and National Wasteland Development Board are two such examples. Right now, various Ministries and Departments of State governments and Central government finance the work of voluntary organisations. In some cases, funding also comes from the district level, largely through District Rural Development Agency.

**What is the implication of this funding ?** Some of this has been discussed earlier in our discussions of the relations between the NGOs and the state. By and large, the following inferences can be drawn:

First, all government funding is available for **specific schemes and programmes**, largely formulated by the government within its own policies and framework of development. It is only rarely that a proposal evolved by a voluntary organisation on its own can receive funding from a government agency.

The second issue that affects voluntary organisations in this regard is, the **bureaucratic procedure and obstacles** entailed in receiving approvals for government funding of the work of voluntary organisations. The various steps in the procedure entail considerable delay, require personal visitations by the leaders and staff of voluntary organisations to concerned government departments and officials, occasionally engaging in corrupt practices to seek approval and release of grants. The problems entailed in this procedure are commonly well-known and have been discussed at various forums by voluntary organisations and government officials and attempts have been made to rectify this situation, but without any significant improvement. In recent times, a committee set up by the Prime Minister (in 1987) provided an excellent report on simplifying the grant-in-aid scheme. But the report of the committee is still gathering dust!

A third implication of government funding is the **amount of money available**. By and large, government funding does not provide for overheads or running costs of a voluntary organisation. It provides for programme activities in the field; it does not provide for full staffing costs, building or maintenance costs, communication costs, staff development training costs, auditing and accounts-keeping costs. Hence, government funding only partially covers the overall requirements of funds of a voluntary organisation.

Various models of costing entailed in different government schemes are also based on several pre-conceived notions about the work of voluntary organisations. The most dominant of these notions is that implementing programmes is the prime objective of voluntary organisations. Therefore, they should not be spending any money on building and maintaining any Organisation. The temporary and transient nature of voluntary organisations is the starting premise in this. The second assumption is that those

working in voluntary organisations are doing it by choice and, therefore, should not look for monetary compensation to sustain themselves and their families in contemporary times. Thus the salary scales of staff cost, wherever included in government schemes, are extremely low, even in comparison with the cost of similar personnel in government institutions.

One can easily understand the consequences of relying on government funding by voluntary organisations in the above framework. Even if we underplay the political consequences of receiving government funding, it becomes clear that the entirety of a voluntary organisation may not get supported by government funding alone. This prompts many such organisations to look for funding from other sources, including foreign sources. It also prompts some others to double the funding with a view to keep some resources to meet those costs not otherwise provided for in the schemes of funding by government agencies. It entails considerable time and energy on the part of the leadership of the organisations to secure such funding and to report on it. And finally, it makes them dependent on the political sensitivity of those ruling the government at a given point of time.

## FOREIGN FUNDING

Unlike in many other countries, foreign funding continues to be a source of great turmoil in the community of Voluntary Development Organisations in India. Historically, as explained earlier, Voluntary initiatives have been a part of the struggle for independence in India - the struggle to do away with a foreign regime, foreign perspective, foreign philosophy and foreign culture. And perhaps as a continuation of the same, acceptance of foreign funds for the work of voluntary organisations continues to be a cultural and political blasphemy in many sections of Indian society. This is so even when foreign funding brings foreign exchange to an economy like India. It is so even when in the last two decades the Government of India has been incessantly and untiringly promoting export-led industrial development. It is so even when the government continues to rely on large grants, loans and credits from foreign governments, bilateral funding agencies, multi-lateral institutions, the World Bank, the IMF as well as commercial banks and lending agencies. It is so even when the states ruled by Communist Party (Marxist), (like West Bengal) have sent their Chief Minister to ask for foreign investment to promote industrial development in that state. It is so even when India continues to finance political and social initiatives in many other parts of the world; and it is so even when many people associated with educational, academic, industrial, business, commercial, government, political, social spheres of work have ongoing links and relations, including that of funds in one form or the other, with their counterparts in other countries of the world. Therefore, it is important to understand that foreign funding of voluntary development organisations in India is a much more complicated and sensitive issue than perhaps in many other countries of the world. It is, therefore, not merely a question of access to funds, but the implications of using it within the community of voluntary organisations, on one hand, and in the larger socio-political context, on the other.

**What is, therefore, the nature of such funding?** Foreign funding in India can be classified in several ways; the box explains some of such forms. The level of funding as reported by Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India by the end of 1989 was of the order of Rs. 685 crores. If we exclude funding to religious institutions and others not included in the scope of the study here, it is possible to estimate that foreign funding coming from all sources, in cash or kind, may today tantamount to something of the range of several hundred crores of rupees.

## TYPES OF FOREIGN FUNDS

While the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act defines foreign funds in a specific technical sense as all funds which have origins in a foreign person, institution or country, it may be useful to understand various types of agencies or institutions involved in providing funding to voluntary development organizations in India. Broadly speaking, there are four types of foreign funding institutions.

The **first** type is bilateral institution. Bilateral aid from agencies, departments and ministries of Governments of the North to Governments of the South is a long-standing phenomenon since the end of second world war. A substantial portion of this aid, more than 99 per cent in case of India, goes to government agencies, departmental programmes and schemes. However, in recent years, a very very small portion of this aid has been made available to voluntary development organizations under the acceptance and approval of the government for a programme largely implemented by the government.

The **second** type of institutions are what can be called multi-lateral institutions - primarily the agencies of the UN system like WHO, UNESCO, FAO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNEP, ILO, etc. Their support to voluntary development organizations in a country like India is also much smaller, largely because it has to be approved by the government and the bulk of it goes to government departments and agencies itself. Other multi-lateral institutions like World Bank have also begun to play an active role in promoting support for voluntary development organizations; though a very very tiny part of it has become available in these endeavors under supervised conditions to some voluntary agencies as part of a larger World Bank-Government programme.

The **third** category of support comes from solidarity groups, trade unions and other related bodies in the countries of the North-raising resources from their members and citizens to support programmes by other institutions and countries of the south. This has been particularly so in the case of international trade union movement historically, though in recent years issues related to human rights, women, ecology, indigenous people, etc., have also found support from such solidarity groups. The Bhopal Gas disaster is another example where several solidarity groups in the developed countries raised resources to support local action in India.

The **fourth** category are non-governmental organizations of the North themselves playing a funding role for voluntary organizations in the

South. Most of these are in Europe, USA, Canada, though Australia, New Zealand and Japan are also beginning to move in this direction. Broadly speaking, under this category, three sub-categories can be formed. One is the support from Church groups. Primarily, European and North American Church as an institution has been collecting resources to provide support for rehabilitation and development agencies working in countries like India for a number of years. The second sub-category comprises of secular NGOs in countries of the North where they raise resources from the public or sometimes from the government and provide support to voluntary development organizations in India. In countries like Germany and Canada, their own governments provide matching grants to such secular NGOs for supporting programmes of voluntary organizations in countries like India. A third sub-category comprises of Foundations which are predominantly a North American phenomenon. The Ford Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, etc., are examples of this form of funding through philanthropic means. Many of these foundations have supported research, training, higher education and in recent years, voluntary development organizations, besides supporting government schemes and programmes in India.

By and large, the support to voluntary development organizations in India comes from this fourth category of non-governmental organizations in countries of the North, as the previous three are restricted to either specialized institutions like trade unions or by the approval and regulation of the government.

There are several issues related to foreign funding. Some of these are very similar to the ones related to government funding or for that matter related to any funding. Some are of course unique to foreign funding. The first issue relates to the influencing of the agenda of voluntary organisations by representatives of foreign funding agencies. In different periods of history, over the last 40 years, different issues have taken primacy in the eyes of voluntary organisations, partly because they were accorded priority by the funders. This can be clearly seen with respect to issues of education, health, women and environment. In specific sense, many a times the representatives of foreign funding agencies tend to influence visibly, openly and directly the programmes and activities of voluntary development organisations, many a times inconsistent with the realities on the ground. This then becomes the translation of personal preferences, whims and fancies of representatives of foreign funding agencies as opposed to organic evolution of programmes and activities based on a systematic analysis of local reality.

The second consequence has been the occasional impression of easy availability of funds. Many groups split, many new organisations were created, many projects got

promoted even in the absence of any purposeful, systematic analysis, but because foreign funds have been promised or are likely to be available. The second aspect of this is, in a few cases, availability of funds more than the amount needed at a given point in time in the life of an organisation. Sudden growth, sudden expansion without systematic planning and attention can lead to major turmoils in a voluntary organisation; and these turning points become 'sudden' because of quick availability of funds.

Yet, the presence of foreign sources of funding has led to availability of funds for innovation and experimentation as well, since much of the government funding is tied to schemes and programmes. New ideas, new initiatives, new approaches, new models, new technologies, new designs in a wide range of areas have emerged largely because of the availability of supportive foreign funding. Yet, much of this funding so far has been based on short duration projects. A voluntary organisation prepares a 3-4 year plan and proposal which can get funded. The organisation moves from project to project, proposal to proposal. Quite a bit of it, therefore, makes the organisation's experience one of a transient and temporary nature.

On the whole, the issue of funding of voluntary organisation has become increasingly critical at this juncture. On the one hand, there is concern related to dependence on external sources of funding - dependence on government funding, on the one hand, and dependence on foreign funding, on the other. Several ideas and attempts are being generated to secure alternative ways of financing the work of voluntary organisations. Yet, no easy solutions or models are likely to emerge. On the other hand, the question of autonomy of voluntary organisations and the issue of funding has been raised. In several ways and at several occasions, voluntary development organisations in India currently face the challenge of ensuring their autonomy, on one hand, and securing a viable and sustainable funding base, on the other.

### **Overall Issues**

**What then are some of the overall issues with respect to the organisational aspects of voluntary development organisations in India. It appears that the fundamental question is what is the purpose of setting up voluntary organisations in India?** The practice on the ground tends to indicate that voluntary organisations as organisational mechanisms are seen as temporary project implementing mechanisms. People, who are part of these organisations are seen as temporarily involved in those organisations. Structures, procedures, system of compensation, internal culture, developmental pressures and responses do not indicate clarity of thinking in retaining, retooling, retraining people who will serve voluntary organisations life long. Similarly, lack of attention to various organisational aspects, to internal conflicts and tensions, to issues of structure and process, to the nature and quality of leadership, to building of mechanisms of accountability, systems, procedures and rules, leadership and capacities - all indicate that, by and large, the

founder(s) as well as others (donors in particular) tend to view voluntary development organisations as temporary phenomenon of short duration implementing a particular programme or a project. Therefore, the question is what is the rationale for the existence of such organisations in a civil society like India?

This raises issues related to the long-term investment and perspective of institution-building of voluntary development organisations in India. In the framework of a parliamentary democracy, in the framework of the State playing a dominant role as a development actor, in a situation where alternative institutions outside the purview of the State or the commercial-industrial sector do not exist (particularly in the rural areas and in a diverse set of fields), is it not appropriate to consider institution-building as the fundamental contribution of voluntary development organisations in the coming period? If the purpose is institution-building, then what are the capacities, perspectives and resources needed to carry that forward? The current practice of voluntary development organisations, of their supporters and their funders and others seem to indicate that institution-building of voluntary organisation is not considered an important purpose. As a result, we may experience the situation where a new generation of people may not either come forward to work in such social change organisations or come forward to create, build and sustain such alternative social change organisations in the Indian society. Therefore, looking at the issues of organisational dynamics, structure and process of voluntary organisations in India needs to be done in a larger framework of the place and overall rationale for the existence of such organisations in the Indian society today.



## INFLUENCING PUBLIC POLICY

What has been the experience of voluntary development organisations in India with respect to influencing public policy? What roles have they played? What are the consequences these roles have resulted in? What are the issues related to influencing public policy by voluntary development organisations in India? In this section, we elaborate the experience of voluntary organisations in India in influencing public policy, on the one hand, and the issues related with the same, on other. The discussion in this section must be viewed in the light of preceding sections.

### Two Routes

In a parliamentary democracy like India, there are two dominant routes or ways of influencing the public policy. The first is the route of influencing **decision-makers**, through influencing bureaucrats and officials. In this route, advocacy, documentation, analysis, research, workshops, committees play a significant role. The second route is influencing public policy by **organized interest groups**. This is the political route where raising ones voice on certain issues in an organized fashion influences the political aspects of public policy. Influencing Parties, Ministers, Members of Parliament and Legislature, Media, Public opinion, etc., are ways of approaching this route.

### NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR HOUSING RIGHTS CASE

The National Campaign for Housing Rights (NCHR) emerged out of a series of discussions held in 1986. Taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the United Nations International Year of Shelter for the Homeless in 1987, the campaign decided to promote a peoples' bill of housing rights, including a fundamental right to housing. It also aimed at collecting and disseminating information on different aspects of housing, including various legislations, litigations and struggles already going on and to develop a wider solidarity among various sections of the society to promote housing as a fundamental right. Over the past five years, the campaign has presented a unique example of bringing together a wide spectrum of people's organisations, trade unions, political parties, voluntary organisations, concerned individuals, cultural groups, academics and professionals on a common platform to present a united view on housing as a fundamental right in the country. It presented a people's petition for housing rights to the Lok Sabha and also evolved a joint-charter of housing demands in collaboration with

Central Trade Union organizations in the country. It mobilized a vast number of institutions to engage in lobbying and educational work on the question of housing rights; a series of workshops were organised by the campaign over these years focusing on gender and housing, housing and rural areas, housing and popular power, etc. A committee was set up by the campaign to evolve a people's bill of housing rights based on the experiences generated from a vast number of people throughout the country.

In order to strengthen the campaign, a Campaign Secretariat was set up in Calcutta with regional and state committees throughout the country. These committees became active nodes for information dissemination, advocacy and mobilization of individuals and institutions to come together on this common platform. The secretariat of the campaign also produced a campaign newsletter called the Networker and a whole series of additional information and documents periodically. The National Campaign for Housing Rights has evolved as a unique model for launching a campaign at the national level on such issues as housing and other fundamental concerns of the people. It is one area in which other campaigns and ways of influencing public policy can learn from. The NCHR influence resulted in a series of debates with the government on formulation of a housing policy for the country, and the overall struggle of the campaign is still on, as the government has not yet evolved a suitable and appropriate acceptable policy on housing.

When we examine the experience of voluntary development organisations in India in the historical context as explained earlier, it seems that the preference has been for the first route. Yet, in recent years, several issues of the people have been raised in a manner resembling the second route of influencing public policy. If one examines the way women's groups organised and lobbied for women's rights, if one looks at the manner in which the issues of the alternative legislation for the rights of construction workers has been handled for the last five years, if we look at the ongoing struggles around the issues of tribals' rights on forest, the issue of dams, then we see that the political route to influencing public policy has been attempted. In this route, influencing the media has been occasionally done; building awareness among the larger public has been rarely done; The history of the relationship between voluntary organisations and political parties has affected their work with party machineries and party leadership. Similarly, influencing of members of legislature and parliament has been only a periodic, rare activity.

However, many examples exist of using public interest litigation as a way of supporting the struggle of the people to influence public policy.

## Public Interest Litigation

Public Interest Litigation became a popular supportive intervention to strengthen the work of NGOs in influencing implementation and development of public policy in the early 80's. The main advantage of Public Interest Litigation was to create the possibility that NGOs and others could approach the Courts for legal justice to the poor without bothering about the question of 'locus standi'. This was made possible by some path-making judgments by the Supreme Court of India, particularly with respect to the issue of release of bonded labour based on the petition of Bandhua Mukti Morcha. The judgement delivered in 1984 lead to a widespread recognition of the possibility of using PIL to support struggles on payment of minimum wages. Effective use of Public Interest Litigation was made to push the government and its various agencies to follow its own legislations. In issues related to land ownership and alienation, minimum wages, bonded labour, rights of construction workers and landless agricultural labourers, atrocities on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and women and many other related issues, Public Interest Litigation has been effectively used.

The first purpose was to ensure implementation of a legislation or an aspect of the constitution giving rights to its citizens. The second purpose was to influence the State and its agencies to be alert to the injustices being caused to the poor by its own actions, either directly or indirectly. And thirdly, judgments on Public Interest Litigation led to the evolution of public policy on the basis of case laws. The most significant example in this regard is the Supreme Court judgment that non-payment of minimum wages tantamounts to bonded labour.

However, the experience of the latter part of the 80's seems to indicate that the initial euphoria and enthusiasm on Public Interest Litigation has been declining. This has partly to do with the changes in the bench of the High Courts and Supreme Court, possibly at the interventions of the governments in appointment of appropriate judges, and partly due to non-institutionalization of the system of Public Interest Litigation itself. However, as a potential ally to influence public policy, Public Interest Litigation has been effectively utilised and can be utilised by NGOs in the country.

In many cases, legal interventions gave some measure of strength to people's attempts to influence policies in their own interests. But the issue of influencing political parties, the issue of influencing political leadership at the Centre and the State level, the issue of influencing representatives of the people in the legislatures and Parliament requires a clarity on the part of voluntary organisations with respect to their relationship with the formal political system. As has been discussed earlier, in the absence of this clarity, there has been some hesitancy in directly influencing these actors in the formal political system. Similarly, concerted, ongoing and sustained interventions to influence the media and to generate widespread public awareness with respect to these causes and issues has not been undertaken. In some ways, this aspect has also been discussed earlier and reflects the history of voluntary development organisations

in India. As a consequence, political route of influencing public policy has not been very effective so far in terms of gains achieved.

### VHAI CASE

Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) has been playing a key role in influencing public policy on health and health-related issues in the country. With its long experience of over 30 years and a network of more than 3,000 health institutions in the country with state level chapters in 17 states and union territories of the country, VHAI today represents a powerful force from the voluntary sector on health related public policy of the country. Two interesting experiences of VHAI can be counted here as illustrations of ways of influencing on public policy. The first one was its support to the creation and functioning of an All India Drug Action Network. A network was set up to lobby for a rational drug policy for the country. It brought together medical professionals, voluntary organizations, people's science movements and other consumer groups to evolve a series of proposals and submissions to the government to evolve a rational drug policy in the country. It also engaged in wide-spread public education campaign on what is the meaning of a rational drug policy through publications, audio-visuals, posters, leaflets, etc.

The second example is the setting up of an advocacy unit within VHAI in recent years, where a team of professionals are engaged in full-time influencing public policy by providing information to Members of Parliament, Ministries, Legislatures, etc. Through this continued interaction with decision-makers in legislatures and parliament, VHAI hopes to influence their thinking on health and health-related policies by feeding information, submissions, engaging them in dialogues and debates in small groups and by bringing them in touch with the real issues affecting the poor people's health in the country.

On the other hand, the route to influence bureaucratic decision-making process with respect to development policies, programmes, rules and procedures has been much more effective. Two trends have contributed to this. **First**, the long-standing experience of many voluntary organisations in areas like health, education, women's welfare, child development, etc., resulted in availability of examples and models which the government could then utilise when it began to formulate its own policies and programmes in those sectors. Thus, under certain favourable political conditions (as transpired in 1977, for example), the then official decision-making machinery incorporated a large number of principles and ideas from voluntary organisations to formulate the national health policy, on one hand, and the national adult education programme, on the other. The policies on child development, environment, welfare have likewise

been significantly influenced on the basis of the experience provided by the work of voluntary organisations. This is an example of the head-start that voluntary organisations had because of their long-standing work in those areas before the government recognized its importance and began to formulate policies and programmes of its own.

The **second** reason it has been so is because of the interaction between the leadership of voluntary development organisations and decision-making government officials. This interaction was significant in the early years after independence as recorded in our history. Many leaders of voluntary organisations coming from a Gandhian tradition interacted frequently and openly with secretaries to the government, District Collectors and other Senior officials responsible for various policies and programmes of the government. However, this trend did not continue and in the 60's and 70's such an interaction decreased significantly. It is only in the last decade or so that renewed interaction has taken place resulting in cross-fertilisation of ideas and influencing back-and-forth. In this regard, certain forums created by the government itself for an ongoing dialogue with voluntary agencies need to be mentioned. One such forum is the mechanism of formulating Annual Plans and Five Year Plans. In many of the committees constituted to make suggestions for Plans, members of voluntary organisations have been invited. Another forum that has facilitated this is the intervention of the Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy of Administration in Mussorie which trains officers of the Indian Administrative Service and other senior Government officials. In the last decade, the Mussorie Academy has systematically invited members of the voluntary organisations to share their experiences with the trainees as well as found ways to send them on exposure visit to see the work of voluntary organisations. This interaction has significantly helped in the process of mutual understanding, dialogue and influencing. Thus, in recent years the access of voluntary organisations to high levels of official decision-making has been on the increase.

Yet, many requirements of using this route to influence the official decision-making have not been effectively sustained by voluntary organisations. For example, systematic research, analysis and documentation has not been carried out with a view to influence public policy. Much of the experience of voluntary organisations is shared orally. Much of the data used by them to argue various positions and approaches is that provided by the rather unreliable statistical machinery of the government itself. Independent data-collection, analysis, documentation and presentation of that with a view to precisely influence public policy has not been carried out. In fact, no significant mechanisms to carry this out on an ongoing basis exist in the entire sector of voluntary development organisations in the country today. Thus, success of the second route to influence public policy by influencing senior officials and decision-makers has been largely on the basis of interpersonal relations, contacts and, therefore, occasional and by chance.

## Trends

**What have been some of the common trends, therefore, in influencing public policy by voluntary development organisations?** Several of these need to be noted. First, voluntary development organisations have historically not focused on influencing public policy in any direct and significant way. As mentioned earlier, much of their attention and energy has been in creating alternative models, innovations, experiments and not so much in influencing the process of formulating and implementing public policies.

The second trend has been that implementing laws, policies and programmes favourable to the interests of the poor has been given some attention. While the very process of formulating those policies has not been undertaken, very few examples of alternative policy statements, alternative formulation of laws or legislations exist in this regard.

The third trend has been that the influence of voluntary development organisations has been more significantly experienced in social service and welfare sectors. Influence on public policies with respect to education, health, child and women welfare, etc., have been more significant, than on issues related to distribution and control over resources. Thus, the efforts of voluntary organisations in influencing public policy with respect to distribution of land, water, forest resources, the rights and entitlements of the tribals, the landless, the women, etc., have not been so successful. The 'class issues', as they could be called, have not been significantly dealt with in the attempts to influence public policy by voluntary development organisations.

The fourth trend is that voluntary development organisations have shown inability to use various forums available in parliamentary democracy to influence public policy. We have neither had the inclination nor the experience or the competence in influencing political parties, political leadership, members of legislatures, parliaments and other mechanisms and forums available in a parliamentary democracy like India.

Another trend has been the inability to recognize the importance of a favourable public opinion and the incapacity to sustain and build that to support the influencing of public policy being attempted by voluntary development organisations. By and large, voluntary development organisations have not paid attention to the importance of influencing the larger public opinion, particularly that of the middle classes, with a view to support their own efforts to influence public policy in the interests of the poor. The most visible example of this failure is the situation with respect to the Narmada Dam where the entire population of Gujarat seems to be against those demanding review of the dam, and in favour of the dam - an example of an excellent public awareness campaign launched by the state government of Gujarat.

And finally, voluntary development organisations have paid a partial attention to the issue of influencing the public policy. This is so because their attention has been

focused largely on areas and issues in which they work - like health, education, water, sanitation, child and women welfare, etc., In the absence of a holistic picture of the economy and polity of the country, in the absence of an understanding of the macro economic and political forces influencing formulation of the public policy in the country, in the absence of a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which the budgetary process occurs, voluntary development organisations have only tried to influence what they know best. This has resulted in their inability to comprehend other aspects of development policies and programmes - like industrial development, export-import, etc., - which takes away a large chunk of national resources and thereby reduces the scope for the policy options, in the areas in which voluntary development organisations work. There is, therefore, a need to have a more comprehensive understanding of the issues of public policy formulation and to situate the efforts to influence public policy within that broad comprehensive framework.

Despite the above trends it needs to be recognised that there has been a significant shift in the understanding of voluntary development organisations in India in the last couple of years. By and large, the importance of understanding macro forces, influencing macro forces and particularly influencing public policy has been seen as an important work of voluntary organisations. Even though this understanding is limited among a few at the moment, it is possible to visualize a situation where voluntary development organisations will become more active in pursuit of influencing public policy in the coming decade. The challenge will be to evolve systems, mechanisms, capacities and institutions needed to play this role of influencing public policy more effectively on a sustained and on-going basis.



## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Any discussion of the future directions and potentials of voluntary development organisations must start with an analysis of some emerging worrisome trends.

### Worrisome Trends

The foregoing analysis of voluntary organisations in India may seem to indicate a rather rosy and positive picture of the contemporary scenario. It may seem to appear that all voluntary organisations at this stage of history are positive, genuine, authentic, full of vigour, competence, capacity, creativity and commitment. The reality is not obviously the same because there are some trends visible in recent years which create some cause for worry. It is, therefore, important to record those trends and bring them to the attention of those interested in long-term roles and contributions of voluntary organisations in India. Indicated below, therefore, are some emerging trends.

1. An oft-repeated comment these days is **mushrooming of voluntary organisations** in India. It is not a trend which indicates a healthy, positive evolution or growth of voluntary organisations in number, kind and spread; but it is a hurried formation, a quick emergence of a large number of voluntary organisations without any careful analysis of their missions, purposes or roles. Many organisations suddenly emerge and continue to operate without taking roots in a local context, without examining the kind of needs that exist in that area, without elaborating what they hope to accomplish. We have to consider this trend as worrisome, i.e., a trend which can undermine the credibility of existing organisations as well as the newly emerging ones. The question, therefore, is to understand why this trend has started.

The trend is not uniform throughout the country and obviously this has regional variations. The causes for the trend, however, are uniform. There has been a proliferation of voluntary organisations with funds coming both from the government and from outside the country. Ever since the formation of CAPART in the recent past, two states, U.P. and Bihar, have witnessed rapid mushrooming of voluntary organisations in order to solicit, secure and siphon-off funds available from CAPART. Similarly, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in the late 70's and early 80's and Orissa in mid 80's is experiencing the mushrooming of voluntary organisations as a result of foreign funds. Easy and large availability of funds with a specific donor interest to promote use of the funds in certain parts of the country tends to lead to sudden mushrooming. It is not to imply that all these

mushrooming voluntary organisations are fake. It is not to imply that those who set them up are using them to make personal income or siphon those funds for some other purpose. It is just that they have been set-up without thought or planning, without application, without assessing the mission, purpose, strategy, approach, etc., It is almost like a fashion.

2. The second worrisome trend is the **use of voluntary organisations for other motivations, other than their social change rationale as we have discussed.** Voluntary organisations are set up with a view to pursue social commitment. Yet, what is happening in certain parts of the country is that voluntary organisations are becoming **shops for commerce.** Voluntary organisations have been used for business, as a cover for business, they are also shops for employment. It is, therefore, not surprising to find a very large number of voluntary organisations in certain parts of the country, like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu where educated, unemployed youth abound. With the availability of funds and unlimited needs to do some development work in the country, these institutions become employment-generation opportunities.

Other motivations for business or commerce are much more dangerous. Many organisations have been set up for the **personal well-being of their founder(s).** Family business and family voluntary organisations share similar characteristic in many respects. In some ways, they have been set up as a cover to acquire government funds in various development sectors as government schemes and programmes begin to give preferences to voluntary organisations registered as Societies or Trusts. In such developmental activities as digging of wells and drilling for drinking water and irrigation, plantation of trees, etc., many contractors and business houses are using these forms of organisations to get to government funds, but continue playing their roles of middle-men and petty-contractors.

Also alarming is a trend of **political parties setting up voluntary organisations.** Historically, as we discussed earlier, many voluntary organisations were part of the freedom struggle; and social action for constructive work and political action for liberation were seen as two sides of the same coin. Many Gandhian inspired voluntary organisations continued to maintain close links with political parties and leadership even after independence. However, the new trend is for political parties to set-up voluntary organisations in certain geographical areas to get to certain populations (like BJP and RSS setting-up voluntary organisations in the tribal belts of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal). They are also set-up by political parties to acquire funds from the government such that their party workers could receive ongoing support on the basis of government grants and projects. In some other cases, it is due to personal needs of several party leaders, who in their middle age, not knowing what else to do, move on to set-up a voluntary organisation for their sustenance.

3. Another worrisome trend in recent years is the **emergence of certain corrupt practices among voluntary organisations**. Many forms are visible in these practices. The first one is, of course, paper organisations, fake organisations, set-up primarily to receive one-time grant from some government departments or foreign agencies to siphon-off money for some personal use. A second trend is, of course, declining standards of personal integrity. Senior leaders of voluntary organisations are being accused in several instances of not maintaining high standards of personal integrity. A third trend, is the visible use of the forces of casteism, communalism, favouritism within the voluntary organisations. These are again part of the larger societal forces and trends but they become critical since voluntary organisations are social change organisations based on certain values and certain social commitment. Hence, the expectations from such organisations and their leadership is of a higher normative and moral order and a set of practices different from the general societal trends and practices.
4. The fourth worrisome trend is the **increasing expression of self-righteousness and arrogance on the part of some voluntary organisations**. With increasing attention to the leadership of voluntary organisations and voluntary organisations in the media and elsewhere, by the government and other international organisations in the past few years, some voluntary organisations are beginning to exude arrogance. They are beginning to behave as if they are "pure", above all controversy, that they 'know all' - negating the experience, the models and opinions of others who are not within voluntary organisations. They are beginning to 'hog the limelight' and attention and beginning to 'sing their own tunes' too often and too loudly. The essential ingredients of humility, of learning are important elements in the work of voluntary organisations in India historically, and they need to be retained in some way or the other.

All these trends are obviously part of the broader societal trend. Whether it is a question of employment or commerce or siphoning-off funds or cover for political activities - these are all broad societal trends visible across the country and voluntary organisations are no exception. They are affected by them to the extent that they are part of this entire societal context. Of course, there are some other general allegations that have been made against voluntary organisations but these are characteristic of a larger society, and not unique to voluntary organisations. Many voluntary organisations and their leadership is being accused of being 'empire-builders', of amassing wealth, infrastructure, staff, activities. While there is nothing wrong with size and scope, what is implied is perhaps a mindless, unthinking and unplanned growth. Another accusation has been territorialism - that many voluntary organisations guard their social, geographical territory jealously. Some even guard their experiences and sectoral positions very jealously. These result in excessive possessiveness and competitiveness. Cooperation among voluntary organisations is not very easy while competitiveness for attention, for resources, for recognition, and for clientele continues.

So these are some emerging and worrisome trends; these are trends which can undermine the entire sector of voluntary organisations because of the practices of a few. It is important that we are alert to them, we pay attention to them and we try and take some collective measures to deal with them.

## Future Challenges

At the end of this study we are faced with the question about the future of voluntary organisations in India. **Do they have a future ? Or, are voluntary organisations merely a transient and temporary phenomenon, in the form in which they exist today ? Will they become a 'freak phenomenon of the second half of the 20th century in the long history of humankind ? Or, are they required for ongoing societal transformation?** It may be said that their contemporary form is transient and temporal, but not the stirrings they represent. While their form may change with the history over time. Yet, as important elements of the contemporary society, we need to explore their future potential. **What kind of roles can they play, and what contributions can they make in our society?** In the previous sections, some preliminary explorations about the future potential of voluntary organisations has been done. Several dimensions of the role and contribution of voluntary organisations in India can be examined. Some of these are used as a starting point for this reflection.

### 1. Clarity of Role in Society

In recent years, the debate on the role of voluntary organisations in Indian society has revolved around many issues, extremes and contradictions. There is a need, therefore, to re-examine this debate and to re-articulate the roles of voluntary organisations in a society like India. It is unlikely that a single role or a single set of roles can be superior or desirable. What is important to understand is what different roles can be assumed in what context? What contributions can they make and what inter-linkages exist across different roles of voluntary organisations? The kinds of false contradictions that need to be overcome are as mentioned below.

The first one states that the role of voluntary organisations is essentially in local settings. They should work at the grass-roots level, with villagers, poor, women, tribals, landless slum-dwellers, street children, etc. This is an attempt to localise the work of voluntary organisations. What about the forces of oppression and control of regulation and determining the framework and resources of development which emanate from national or international levels ? Mere localised action of voluntary organisations will reduce the likelihood of their potential to be used for contributing towards social transformation. They must work also at the regional, state, national or international levels. The same form and mechanism will not be effective at all levels. The one which is active at the local level will not be effective at national or international level. So the challenge is not to work at the local or national level. The challenge is to continue to work at the local level with a national framework and vice-versa.

The second false contradiction is posited on the dimension of innovation or experimentation at the grass-roots level or advocacy for policy change. Some voluntary organisations believe that their role is to promote innovations, to promote experimentation, to bring in new ideas, models and experiences by practical implementation at the grass-roots. Some others work at the level of advocacy, influencing policy-makers, decision makers at the state, national or international levels. But this is a false distinction because advocacy cannot sustain itself without being rooted in local experimentation and innovation, and that cannot survive long enough if it does not influence the policy frameworks at the national and global levels. Thus, both are needed as they supplement each other.

Another recent false dichotomy that is beginning among voluntary organisations in India is the debate between activism and professionalism. Activists are those who are "accused" as being implementors of activities, who have over the years through their sheer experience and dedication continued to work with the people. Perhaps they have not been that efficient, perhaps they are not even that cost-effective, perhaps they are not able to plan, monitor and manage their work. Professionals, on the other hand, come with competence in a particular professional area, formal education, models, frameworks, and a sense of confidence associated with that alone with the knowledge of management tools and techniques. However, they are being accused of being insensitive (unrooted), lacking experience and humility to pursue this kind of intervention. Again, a false dichotomy because the professional is one who is committed towards work. A professional is not so by nature of formal education and degree. Many engineers, doctors, lawyers and scientists can be extremely unprofessional in the manner in which they work. Yet, many activists, without formal education and degrees, are extremely professional in the manner in which they carry out their work with local communities. Both perspectives and capacities are needed to support each other. The challenge is how do we make our activists more competent, and how do we make our professionally trained colleagues more sensitive to the grass-root realities.

And finally, the dichotomy between developmental action versus political action. Interestingly enough, as has been seen through history, this dichotomy did not exist before independence. In fact, all social action and constructive work was closely linked to political action for freedom. This dichotomy has evolved, increased and engulfed voluntary organisations during the last 40 years. Many in voluntary organisations believe in developmental action. Many others decline such interventions because it is not political action. In an unjust, unequal society like India where a small elite controls a large percentage of resources, any developmental intervention has political potential. Hence, de-linking the two is a strategy to reduce the effectiveness of developmental intervention. The challenge for voluntary organisations in the future is to be able to combine their develop-

mental interventions with political struggle, that the act of 'rebuilding' has to be based on a framework of struggle and organisation.

In this context, the debate on the large and small, centre or periphery can also be mentioned here. Some argue that small is beautiful and large is ugly. Some realise that large is needed to make a dent and is also possible, feasible and desirable; while small is marginal and ineffective. Some argue that metropolitan city-based 'urban' voluntary organisations are dominating the rural, small, poor voluntary organisations. Some argue the opposite. In the vast chain of struggles for social transformation, we need small and large organisations, we need central and periphery organisations and we need work at the local, regional and national levels. We need organisers and activists, researchers and documentalists, networkers and advocates, educationists and a vast array of people with diverse locations, contributions and expertise, but all committed to bring about social transformation. Unless voluntary organisations in India recognise this and gear themselves up to accept and play multiple roles in society in the coming period, they will find themselves marginalized and constrained because the forces which are trying to delimit that contribution and scope of their work and delimit the roles and functions are also simultaneously active.

## **2. Larger Societal Forces**

Voluntary organisations in India need to come to terms with the existence and contribution of larger societal forces -socio-political and economic. These forces are active not only in the national but also in the international context.

Many leaders of voluntary organisations have not developed sufficient understanding of the character of the State, the nature of the formal politics in parliamentary democracy, and the roles and styles of functioning of political parties in the contemporary society. Without going in-depth in understanding these aspects, the future contributions of voluntary organisations may remain limited.

A related issue is the question of wider engagement on issues of society. Many voluntary organisations are unable to understand, debate or critique the larger issues of industrial development policies, the question of the international trade, licensing and barter policies, the impact of macro politics on local development, etc. Similarly, engagement with other agents of social transformation in society is limited. Alliance with political parties, with trade unions, with teachers' organisations, with students' movements etc., are rare. There is a need to re-engage voluntary organisations with such other institutions, mechanisms and forces in society.

The third aspect of this is the question of taking positions and doing something on emerging societal concerns. In the contemporary context, the issue of secularism and communalism is a critical one. Yet, many voluntary organisations find

themselves unable to come together and do something positive about it. Unless we find mechanisms and ways by which voluntary organisations can engage themselves in dealing with emerging societal issues like communalism, take some concrete actions in working towards secularism, they will be limiting their future potential and contribution in the coming period. It is, therefore, important that a sensitive, analytical approach to larger societal issues and forces is built and the role of voluntary organisations and their future potential is visualized in that light.

### 3. Global Trends

It is also important to look at what the emerging global trends in general are, as well as in particular the role of NGOs and voluntary organisations. There are several emerging trends with respect to NGOs globally. In some societies, NGOs are beginning to take on larger developmental roles. They are undertaking the task to promote development of their societies and communities. They are almost becoming an alternative to the State. In some other societies, NGOs are taking on political roles; they are becoming alternatives to parties. Whatever may be the roles of NGOs in those societies, it is contextualised with respect to the State as well as the existing political formations. Where the State is weak and unable to carry on the developmental role (like in many African countries), NGOs have been trying to take all those roles. Where the society is unable to evolve a viable democratic political framework, many NGOs have begun to represent aspirations for democratic traditions (as has been happening earlier in countries like Chile and the Philippines).

Many governments of the North are beginning to re-examine financial aid. In the early 80's, many of them began to see the futility of continued aid to governments of the South. They began to explore possibilities of using NGOs of the North and the NGOs of South as alternative channels for bilateral aid from the North. US AID and CIDA have been pioneers in this initiative. Though many other European countries have also begun to move in that direction, a large number of American PVOs have emerged in order to act as conduits for US AID funds to go to many African and Latin American countries.

Another trend has been that of emerging networks of alternative information and influence. Many international networks and associations of voluntary organisations have been able to channelise information throughout the world on emerging issues and concerns. The last decade has also seen the emergence of coalitions and networks initiated and controlled by NGOs of the South. This has been in contrast to most other efforts which had been north-centric, both by the governments as well as academic institutions and even the NGOs. This trend of South-led coalitions and networks to take on issues has been an alternative to north-centric discourse on development problems and strategies in our countries.

In a way, as a consequence of the above, there has also emerged a greater concern among NGOs of the South, to provide solidarity to their counterparts in the North for promoting and sustaining development education in the countries of the North. It has become increasingly clear that significant changes in the global order require concerted educational interventions with the people, and the policy and decision-makers of the North. NGOs of the North, by virtue of their ongoing links, flow of information and perspective derived from their experience of the South, could well be in an advantageous position to play this role effectively.

These global trends also make certain possibilities for future roles and directions of voluntary development organisations in India. They also suggest some possible ways in which some of the desirable trends can be strengthened and reinforced, and some other not so desirable ones could be challenged and resisted.

#### **4. Contemporary Challenges**

A further area of examination is the challenges that we all experience in our contemporary context. These challenges are emerging from a diverse set of forces and each one of them requires deeper understanding and elaboration. We are enumerating them here with a view to provide a basis for examining these subsequently.

The first challenge is the consolidation of the trend that emerged in the 60's and 70's towards internationalisation of economies. The global economic order now encompasses all the villages, slums and suburbs of practically all the countries of the world. The internationalisation of economies is also followed by patterns of internationalisation of societies and cultures. Indigenous culture, indigenous knowledge base, customs and practices, priorities, indigenous models and frameworks of development, and visions of a society are rapidly giving way to a universal, uniform, westernised view of the society, culture and economy. Traditional dresses with all their functionality and economy have given way to T-shirts and denim jeans; indigenous thirst-quenchers (water) have given way to 'Pepsi-Cola'.

Another trend that has also been invisible for many decades but getting consolidated in recent years is the centralisation of economic and political power. Challenges to this continued effort towards centralisation of economic and political power are being met with severe punishments (as has been amply demonstrated in the Gulf war recently). This centralisation is further being assisted by the emerging new technology which provides for means to monitor and control global operations from one location. The events of last few years have also resulted in the demise of the 'political east'. The happenings of eastern Europe, the developments in Nicaragua, are leading to a world where the only ideology and model of society and economy that survives is that of capitalism.

At the same time problems associated with the growing strength of capitalism are also becoming increasingly visible among the poor and the exploited of the countries of the South.

Alternatives to this ideology and philosophy are more urgently needed now than ever before. These alternatives could not be easily formulated in the form of one or the other 'ism'. The challenge of growing control of mass media on the minds and hearts of ordinary people has become ever more so strong and powerful. The ruling elites continue to control national and international mass media and centralisation of this control has also been rapidly increasing. The availability of satellite technology has considerably improved the possibility of this control by the rich. In fact, in a couple of years, the whole world and its audience will be under the influence of global television operations.

Many parts of the world are witnessing the crisis of ethnic identities and challenges to the concept of a nation state. Post World War II phenomenon resulted in drawing of boundaries and emergence of nation-states in many countries of the South. The experience of the last 50 years clearly indicates that indigenous identities continue to survive and assert themselves to challenge the very premise of a nation-state. The commonalties of experiences, problems and struggles throughout the world also seem to further question the legitimacy of considering nation-state as sacrosanct. This is a question that also goes to the roots of the links between the 'civil' society and the State. It is here that deeper analysis and understanding is needed.

Finally, the world has also been witnessing growing confrontation and struggles by the organisations and the representatives of the poor. Despite centralisation of economic and political power, despite national or international control over mass media, and growing marginalisation and exploitation of the poor, their capacity to continue to organise themselves and wage struggles has been remarkable and ongoing. The assertion of the rights of the poor to define a world of their own has been taking place throughout the world in countries of the South and the North, East and the West. And it is this which provides the possibility of hope in the future.

**What then could be the potential for voluntary development organisations in India ? Given the above dimensions and trends, what kinds of tasks and roles require salience and primacy ?** It seems that the need for articulating a new vision of society and elaborating new frameworks and models of development based on the capacities and knowledge base of the poor are perhaps the urgent requirements of the coming decade, globally and specifically in India. The nature of the political process that has been going on in recent years also hints towards the possibility of evolving an alternative politics in the future, politics of the issues of the poor, and not merely a politics of parties. It is here that the

requirements of understanding, solidarity and building coalitions take preponderance over the requirements of establishing unique and individual identities. With increasing attention being paid to voluntary development organisations in India and the larger global trend in this direction, questions of public accountability have to be faced, questions of accountability to donors, to boards and staff, people in their constituency, to themselves and their colleagues, as well as the State need to be addressed urgently. Otherwise, trends towards imposing such accountability systems by the State are gaining further strength.

The question of defining the agenda for the development of the country and its people and evolving an appropriate politics, on one hand, and building capacities, on the other, seems to be the future role of the voluntary development organisations in India. This, in a sense, is a vast role, a difficult but a challenging role. **Only the future will tell whether this role is assumed by voluntary development organisations or not.**

## NOTES

1. Most reports of bilateral aid agencies began to include NGOs in their policy documents during early to mid 1980's.
2. Debate on National Council of Voluntary Agencies and Code of Conduct could be pursued through the Lokayan Bulletin. (Vol. 4, No. 3/4)
3. The Five Year Plans provide the official perspective of development in the country. See the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90) Document, Government of India.
4. See various writings of Prof. Rajni Kothari on the issue of State and Civil Society. See Rajni Kothari - 'State Against Democracy, In Search of Humane Governance'(Ajanta Publications, India 1988)
5. A number of materials are available on Participatory Research. See PRIA publications, ICAE publications, etc. A more recent collection is in **Convergence**.
6. Social Reform movements can be traced to the rise of capitalism and the influence of Renaissance. They were of two types - reformist and revivalist. The former emphasized a rational love for the past, while the latter reflected a romantic love for the past. Social reformists felt it necessary to adopt western ideas and influences to reform Indian society. Social revivalists believed in removing the degenerative aspects of the Indian cultural past.
7. For details on social reform movements see A.R. Desai - 'Social Background of Indian Nationalism'. (Popular Prakashan 1966)
8. The uprising of 1857 was in its essential character and dominant leadership the revolt of the old conservative and feudal forces, and dethroned potentates for the rights and privileges they saw in the process of destruction. Though it was seen as the first war of independence, there was no force capable of leading and voicing the concerns of the exploited and oppressed peasantry, no cohesive strategy, and thus the revolt was a failure. Yet it laid bare the depth of discontent and unrest beneath the surface, and created an alarm in the British rulers. (R. P. Dutt - India Today, Manisha Granthalaya Pvt. Ltd. 1986).
9. Reform measures by British in late nineteenth century - See Sumit Sarkar - 'Modern India'
10. Swadeshi implies 'our own' and the movement encompasses boycott of every-

thing that was foreign and accepting everything that was indigenous. The swadeshi movement as part of the moderates' economic policy provided an economic critique of imperialism.

11. Congress Socialist Party was the left alternative within Congress in mid 1930s. It emerged out of the disillusionment with the Civil Disobedience movement and doubts regarding success of Gandhism at a time of rising world capitalism. One of the trends of socialism, the CSP acted as a bridge for radical nationalists to pass over to full-fledged Marxism.
12. For details on development strategy see Francine R. Frankel: 'India's Political Economy 1947-1977 - The Gradual Revolution.' (Oxford University Press, Delhi 1978).
13. Origins can be traced to the struggle in Naxalbari in the late 60s. The Naxalite ideology was extreme leftism and they believed that revolution is possible only in the rural areas where there is maximum exploitation. They protested against greater concentration of land and regarded the Indian state as an imperialist state.
14. The proclamation of emergency (under Article 352 of the Indian Constitution) from June 1975 to March 1977 placed unlimited authority in the hands of the central government suspending both the federal provisions of the constitution, civil liberties and guarantees for fundamental rights. The centre acquired powers to make and execute state laws, proclaimed censorship and postponed general elections among other things. Through all this, the ruling Congress Party enjoyed secure majorities both in the national parliament and in the legislative assemblies of almost all the states.
15. J.P. movement under the aegis of its leader Jaya Prakash Narayan, a leading socialist of modern India played a significant role in cementing anti-Indira Gandhi forces in 1974 which eventually forged a united front in the shape of the Janata party. The movement (with its call for 'Total revolution') which started with protesting against corruption ended with the demand of the right to recall (i.e. elected leaders have to be accountable to the people) from the falling Bihar government. Finally the movement in itself became corrupted.
16. These are some political sessionist and extremist organisations functioning in different states of India.
17. The R.K. Mission inspired by the great saint, Rama Krishna Paramhans advocated Hindu revivalism and revolted against cultural imperialism. Its thrust was that Hindu society cannot develop unless it takes over some philanthropic work, and therefore, advocated caring for 'needy' people.
18. See PRIA publication - NGO-Government Relations : A Source of Life or a Kiss of Death. (1989)

19. See PRIA publication 'Forms of Organisation - Square Pegs in Round Holes'. (1987)
20. See PRIA manual on Financial Management. (1990)
21. Grant-in-Aid Committee Report, August 1988 - Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Government of India.
22. For details, see PRIA publication 'Forms of Organisation - Square Pegs in Round Holes'. (1987)



## ABOUT US

Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), New Delhi is an educational support organisation, which works with activists, individuals, grass root groups and organisations so as to strengthen their capacities in the areas of participatory research, participatory training and evaluation, and organisation building and help them deepen their understanding of the issues they are working on.

Participatory Research implies an effort on the part of the people to understand the role of knowledge as a significant instrument of power and control. It gives value to individual and collective experiences, and gives credit to existing popular knowledge. It therefore, challenges the monopoly over knowledge and its tools in the hands of the few, and contributes towards the empowerment of the oppressed and poor.

In the last ten years of its existence, PRIA has focussed on wide-ranging issues such as adult non-formal education, problems of deforestation, land alienation and large dams, women and work, women and sanitation, occupational health hazards and management issues of NGOs. In the coming years PRIA's focus would be on looking at issues of women's empowerment, people's access to control over natural resources, occupational safety, workers' education and enhancing competencies of activists and groups in individual and organisational areas.

PRIA is constantly involved in efforts to promote the understanding and practice of PT philosophy and methodology by holding workshops and documenting several efforts in the country.

The Training of Trainers programme aims at capacity building of grassroots activists and educators.

PRIA's Popular Documentation and Resource Centre aims at preparing and disseminating popular materials on a variety of issues so as to facilitate a wider access to the grassroots and contribute towards social and political change.

Rajesh Tandon, Anil K. Chaudhary, Suneeta Dhar, Rajesh Pandey, Nandini Narula and Aanchal Kapoor from PRIA have contributed in accomplishment of this study.

## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX	I	List of Selected Institutions Visited to Collect Materials
APPENDIX	II	Guidelines for Interview
APPENDIX	III	List of Case Studies
APPENDIX	IV	Regional Reflection Meetings

## **APPENDIX - I**

### **LIST OF SELECTED INSTITUTIONS VISITED TO COLLECT MATERIALS**

1. AHMEDABAD :
  - Indian Institute of Management
  - SETU
  - Centre for Environment Education
  - Gandhi Labour Institute
2. SURAT :
  - Centre for Social Studies, Surat
  - Surat University
3. BOMBAY :
  - Tata Institute of Social Studies
  - CED - Centre for Education & Documentation
4. DELHI :
  - Lokayan
  - Centre for Policy Research
  - AVARD
  - CAPART
  - National Labour Institute
  - IIPA
  - NIPCCD
  - Centre for Womens' Development Studies
  - Delhi School of Social Work
  - Planning Commission
  - Centre Secretariat Library
  - FAIR
  - CISRS
5. CALCUTTA :
  - Indian Institute of Management
  - Asiatic Society of India

- National Library
- UNNAYAN
- 6. HYDERABAD : - National Institute of Rural Development
- 7. MADRAS : - Madras Institute for Development Studies
- College of Social Work, Madras
- 8. BANGALORE : - Indian Institute of Management

## **APPENDIX - II**

### **GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEW**

1. What was the nature of voluntary agencies in the country before independence ?
2. How do you see the changes in the character, work and roles of voluntary agencies since independence ?
3. How do you classify voluntary agencies in the country today (on the basis of activities, ideology, organizational form etc.) ?
4. What are some of the problems faced by voluntary agencies today ?
5. What is your experience and/or opinion on the relations between voluntary agencies and the government ?
6. What is your experience and/or opinion on the relations between voluntary agencies and political parties ?
7. What is your view on the question of funding (including self-sufficiency) of voluntary agencies ?
8. What do you see as the future of voluntary agencies in the country ?



## APPENDIX -III

### LIST OF CASE STUDIES

#### A. In-Depth

1. Rural Development Trust  
Bangalore Highway Road  
Anantpur  
ANDHRA PRADESH
2. Vidhyak Sansad  
Kashtkari Sanghatana  
3, Yezdih Behram  
Kantiwadi, Mulayan  
Dahanu Road, Thane  
MAHARASHTRA - 401602
3. RKM : Lok Shiksha Parishad  
Ramakrishna Mission Ashram  
P.O. Narenderpuri  
Dist. 24, Parganas  
WEST BENGAL - 743 508
4. All India Taleem Ghar  
24-25, Western Court  
Janpath  
NEW DELHI - 110 001
5. Gram Vikas  
Narsinghpur  
P.O. Mohuda  
Via Berhampur  
ORISSA - 760 002
6. AVARD  
5 (FF) Institutional Area  
Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg  
NEW DELHI - 110 002
7. SEWAPURI  
Sewapuri  
Varanasi  
UTTAR PRADESH - 221 403
8. SEWA  
Sewa Reception Centre  
Opp. Victoria Garden  
AHMEDABAD - 380 001  
GUJARAT

#### B. Short

1. Indian Social Institute  
10, Lodi Institutional Area  
Lodhi Road,  
NEW DELHI -110 003
2. Vidhyak Bhawan  
At/P.O. Dahisar  
Teh. Vasai  
Dist. Thane  
MAHARASHTRA - 401 303
3. AFPRO  
25/1A, Institutional Area  
Panka Road, D Block,  
Janakpuri  
NEW DELHI - 110 058
4. VANI  
H-17/1, Malviya Nagar  
NEW DELHI - 110 017
5. CROSS  
1-69, Snehpuri  
Nacharam  
Hyderabad - 501 507  
ANDHRA PRADESH

## APPENDIX - IV

### REGIONAL REFLECTION MEETINGS

	<b>Location</b>		<b>No. of Participants</b>
1. Bhubaneswar	(Orissa) April 1990	East	20
2. Trivandrum	(Kerala) May 1990	South	20
3. Raipur	(Madhya Pradesh) June 1990	Central	38
4. Ahmedabad	(Gujarat) June 1990	West	32
5. Delhi	August 1990		18





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